

THE BEING PROJECT:
A 30-DAY JOURNEY TOWARD AWARENESS, AUTHENTICITY AND INTIMACY
WITH CHRIST

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To my beautiful bride, P. Candace:

My wise, soulful, life-celebrating companion on the journey.

You have my heart,

I choose us.

Slow Down, you move too fast...

–Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel, The 59th Street Bridge Son

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ABSTRACT

This thesis-project examines intimacy with God among overseas evangelical missionaries and suggests that spiritual vitality can be enhanced through the use of reflective Scripture reading, vulnerable relationships and renewed awareness. The thesis-project engages data from multidisciplinary sources and uses the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) as a primary reference point to quantify change in the test group. Partners committed to a 30-day intensive with prescribed reflective Scripture reading, awareness exercises and weekly companionship. Conclusions were formed based of pre and post AGI assessments, in addition to survey and interview data from each participant.

CHAPTER ONE

PRESSURE TO PRODUCE AND PERFORM

Introduction: Aims and Goals

Getting to the “heart of the matter” is a phrase that reflects a desire to understand that which is most true about a situation. This often involves prioritizing issues in such a way that less important things can be systematically culled away and set aside, leaving only that which is truly essential as a primary point of reference or understanding. This is an important life skill to master since most decisions are best made in light of a clear understanding of core issues. The heart of the matter is most easily recognized in arenas that are measurable and lack subjective or intuitive components. For example, the central goal of a business owner may be realizing a profit. This can easily be evaluated with a spreadsheet and financial evaluation. The heart of the matter is more difficult to determine in an environment of multiple competing agendas and subjective interpretations of goals. Many marriage counselors have mediated couples in conflict who looked at the same relational data and defined the heart of the matter in drastically different ways. Seldom is the heart of the matter more challenging to determine than when the focus of the discussion is the soul or central self.

The aim of this project is to examine key biblical, theological, and contextual issues that surround the cultivation and sustainment of a dynamic, spiritually vital “self” in an overseas missions’ environment. Several questions are at “the heart” of this discussion:

- What is the nature of a self?

- What are the “diseases” that threaten self in an evangelical missions’ environment, and how are they best diagnosed?
- What keeps the self healthy, and in what conditions does it best grow?

The questions and observations that follow are significant for all believers who are interested in spiritual formation, but for those in the “professional” Christian service demographic, the importance of a healthy self is magnified and complicated by geographic isolation and the need to “present well” as missionary leaders.

Definitions and Terms

For the purpose of this thesis-project the words *self* and *soul* will be used interchangeably as referring to the integrated place of a person’s being that uniquely expresses God’s image and that hungers for connection with him. Bible linguists use many English words to convey the idea of the soul/self in the OT (*nephesh*) and in the NT (*psyche*). Some of these are “soul”, “life”, “person”, “mind”, “heart”, “body”, “desire”, “man”, “appetite”, “lust”, “self”, “pleasure”, “breath” and “will”.¹ Gary Moon highlights the ambiguity of Biblical writers when addressing the components of the inner life observing, “Scripture is imprecise.”² Getting fixated on exact definitions misses the primary point, that all people have a central identity that is designed to connect with God. In this project the term “soul” will reference a person’s truest self which is designed as a reflection of the image of God.

¹ James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Abingdon Press, 1890), entries 5315 and 5590.

² Gary W. Moon, *Spiritual Formation and Soul Care: A Response to “An Old Call in Need of New Voices,”* Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care 7, no. 2 (2014): 286, accessed February 4, 2017, WorldCat.

Context

The idea of an “isolated self” is a myth. Western culture may promote “rugged individualism,” but neuroscientist Curt Thompson contends, “It is not possible for us not to influence others or not to be influenced by others.”³ Because of the interrelated nature of souls to one another, context forms an important component to evaluating soul/self health and growth. Common Biblical principles influence all discussions concerning soul health, but the application and evaluation of these principles vary according to the nature of the context in which the soul hopes to thrive.

This thesis-project focuses on understanding the nature of a healthy self against the backdrop of overseas evangelical missions culture.

The Problem

Missionary service draws certain temperaments. Most evangelical mission agencies are filled with self-starters who have been captured by a cause and entertain some hope of impacting the world by influencing the cause. There are different expressions of missionary zeal, from Bible translation to social justice initiatives, but most people who populate these fields of Christian service have several things in common.

- **They Know:** They are well-trained Bible readers who have been nurtured in a tradition that values finding Scriptural answers to perceived problems.

³ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising connection between neuroscience and spiritual practices that can transform your life and relationships* (Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), 99.

- **They Go:** These individuals have taken seriously the Biblical call to forsake cultural comforts and sacrificially serve the cause of Christ.
- **They Do:** Give them a challenge and they will align the resources and energy required to succeed. They are committed workers, problem solvers, and activators.

The “Knowing-Going-Doing” culture of evangelical missions has a rich history and a valuable legacy. Inspiring stories of perseverance and faith come from this tradition. In addition, “Knowing-Going-Doing” characteristics have generally served missionaries well in the mobilization and launch phases of their lives. There is, however, a shadow side to many missionary stories that is often left untold. “Knowing-Going-Doing” culture does not lend itself to the fragile moments of soul formation that are often filled with doubt, loneliness, and struggle. The soul does not grow well in the soil of metrics, assessments, and production. The Being Project (this thesis-project) is an attempt to understand, examine, and encourage “Asking-Waiting-Being” values, in the “Knowing-Going-Doing” culture of evangelical missions.

The Being Project: Roots and Reasons

I have been a member of an evangelical missions agency for over 30 years. I started as a front line worker, moved into regional leadership, ultimately becoming a division director and a member of the executive team. For the last seven years I have served on the Pastoral Care Team. Over the 30+ years of my service my responsibilities have changed but the most significant transition involved the shift from leadership to pastoral care.

My mission appropriately includes pastoral care in the job description of every leader. Pastoral care, however, must be measured against other, sometimes competing values. As a regional and division leader, I was responsible to cultivate an environment that created healthy ministry outcomes that were in line with the strategic plan of the organization. There were necessary metrics to ensuring forward progress that often complicated my desire to pastorally care for those to whom I provided leadership. I recall one conversation with a person in my chain of command that made this tension abundantly clear. The man with whom I was meeting asked me directly what role I was currently in? Was I his leader, his friend, or his counselor? In times of health and productivity (ministry and personal) these roles may not conflict, but in times of difficulty, they can be maddeningly contentious.

I must confess that “Knowing-Going-Doing” values and metrics were central to my leadership strategy. When someone was dealing with ministry or life challenges, I often encouraged them in “doing” rather than “being” categories. I often felt a tension between securing an effective ministry product and giving space for growth, failure, and process. No doubt, there are leaders that navigate this challenge better than I did, but during my 15 years of leadership responsibility, I witnessed too many committed missionaries burn out due to the elusive pursuit of validation connected to their productivity. It must also be noted that I was one of the casualties.

In 2004, after 8 years as a division director, I staggered into a five-month sabbatical, unsure of how exactly I would regain my energy and passion (both for the Lord and for my job). Even in this broken state, I continued to look toward “doing” metrics for health. In the first week of sabbatical my wife inquired about my plans for

restoration. I proceeded to give her a list of books I would read and a discipleship curriculum that I planned to create. Several minutes into my monologue she prophetically muttered, “You are such a control freak.” This caught my attention and served as a launch point that exposed my frantic effort to restore myself. I would later come to understand the frenzied effort as an attempt to prove my worth to a God who I was not strongly convinced liked me.

I was encouraged by a mentor to allow for lots of space to find my spiritual footing and to trust that the path to restored health would be clearer down the road. The first month involved novels, naps, and exercise. In the second month a hunger for the Bible started to return. During the third month I spent a week in a monastic community, a step that was way out of my evangelical comfort zone. In the monastery I was immersed in a week of “being” that invited me to ask of the Lord the questions that lurked beneath the controlling bent of my spiritual exercise regimen. Many of the core values and exercises of the “Being Project” find their roots in the freedom I found in that monastic week.

Over the last 12 years, in both leadership and pastoral care roles, I have experimented with adapting monastic practices to my evangelical missions context. My current pastoral care role is a rare realm of unencumbered “being” in a “Knowing, Going and Doing” culture. I have no authority. I cannot require anyone to do anything, which is a big change from my leadership days. I do, however, enjoy influence in proportion to the trust of my colleagues and have been happily surprised by the fruit born from it. This role has allowed me to engage with every level of missionary staff in every kind of ministry/life discussion. Relational conflict (team, marriage, children), personal faith

struggle, vocational confusion, health related difficulty, sexual failure- everything is in bounds, and I am never responsible for metrics, just healthy process. I am thankful for a gracious and gifted mission leadership team who faithfully carry the legitimate responsibility of strategic planning and evaluation and who were wise enough, seven years ago, to recognize the value of tasking a few within the mission to focus on “being.”

The Being Project emerges from thousands of hours of process-related conversations with evangelical missionaries. It is proudly rooted in a “knowing-going-doing” culture and, at the same time, encourages that culture to integrate space, awareness, and mystery as oft-missing components to soul health among evangelicals. It is a thirty-day, self-guided, reflective Scripture reading encounter that attempts to engage right brain creative function. It uses ancient monastic exercises to stimulate self-awareness and development, and it encourages vulnerable exposure to God and a selected “listener” as a pathway to increased intimacy. Participants in the Being Project took an Attachment to God inventory before and after the 30-day intensive. I hoped to see some appreciable growth in their sense of intimacy with God based on intentionally “being” with him.

Missionary Culture

This chapter will attempt to understand and examine challenges that exist to healthy soul development among an evangelical missions demographic in three overlapping categories: evangelical missions’ issues, occupational hazards and incomplete discipleship/training models. Chapter two will examine the soul/self through a Biblical/theological lens as the *Imago Dei*. Any meaningful Christian discussion of the

soul must be firmly rooted in understanding God’s design, the impact of the Fall, and the path toward soul restoration. Not surprisingly, identity (being) and relationship (being with another being) will be central to this discussion. Before describing the structure and execution of the project in chapter four, and the results of the project in chapter five, a collection of four primary authors will be brought “into dialogue.” The engagement with these authors in chapter three is intentionally multi disciplinary, recognizing that the complexity of the soul/self is most honored by such variety.

Evangelical Missions Issues

Richard Foster defines the Evangelical expression of the Christian faith with three great themes: “the faithful proclamation of the gospel, the centrality of Scripture as the faithful repository of the gospel, and the confessional witness of the early Christian community as a faithful interpretation of the gospel.”⁴ He further observes that the “evangelical witness is rooted in doctrinal fidelity as well as the transforming experience of conversion.”⁵ Understanding the Bible is at the heart of evangelical theology. Most post graduate evangelical training is filled with classes designed to teach the truth about the Bible, and most missions organizations launch recruits trained by these institutions who are “prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks... for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15).⁶ Evangelical missionaries are trained to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2). The attention devoted to scholarship and personal holiness

⁴ Richard Foster, *Prayer, Finding the Heart’s True Home* (New York: Harper Collins Press, 1992), 219.

⁵ Richard Foster, *Streams in the Desert, Celebrating the Great Traditions of the Faith* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 225.

⁶ All Scripture citations will be taken from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

among evangelicals is a gift to the wider Christian community. Certainly the foundational essentials of the gospel are meant to be studied, lived, and taught, but these same convictions also form significant recurring blind spots among evangelical missionaries.

Evangelical Blind Spots

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church chose a famous quote for their theological motto: “In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, in all things charity, truth and love.”⁷ Evangelicals, however, have a history of disagreement over what is doctrinally essential, and the movement’s strong allegiance to Scripture has sometimes led to conversations that were prematurely ended with phrases such as, “Well, the Bible says...” A soul grows best in a safe, gracious, open environment. The “I know” of many evangelical missions’ environments can create a closed system that does not allow for the trial and error process of honest soul exploration. The ramifications of an unchallenged “I know” environment can be seen in what Stanford University psychologist, Dr. Carol S. Dweck calls a “fixed mindset.” A static view of what needs to be mastered can lead to a culture in which people need to appear smart for the sake of validation and recognition. For the person who embraces a fixed mindset, the ideas of others are threatening, as are new situations that might expose individual inadequacy.⁸ “I know” culture can be highly competitive and judgmental. It is also toxic for a healthy soul in need of generosity and grace.

⁷ “EPC: History”, EPC: A Global Movement of Presbyterian Churches, March 3, 2016, accessed February 12, 2017, <https://www.epc.org/history>.

⁸ Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Random House, 2006), 245.

Another potential challenge for the healthy soul is connected to the evangelical priority to find answers. The desire to be a man or woman of the Word can find subtle expression in a desire to master the text, rather than to be mastered by it. The Bible can begin to be seen as an owner's manual filled with principles for correct living rather than a love letter from God. Michael Casey observes that the early church distinguished between catechism (the teaching of foundational truth for beginning believers) and mystagagia (entering daily and deeply into the mystery of God as mature believers).⁹ Mystagagia engages the Bible and invites the Spirit to "untidy our lives."¹⁰ Chris Webb writes that Scripture "comforts, jars, inspires and grates," defying neat theological compartments.¹¹

Mystery is not often talked about in evangelical circles, but it is significant to creating an environment where a soul can grow. God must be seen as bigger than the Book. Webb says that "the Bible leads us beyond the Bible."¹² Casey points out that it is important to see the Bible as God's "Abbreviated Word," reduced to what we are able to digest.¹³ Both men invite the soul to a high view of Scripture and a higher view of its author. The "I know" part of missionary culture is rooted in the "sola scriptura" of the Reformation and is expressed in a high level of dependence on the Scriptures. Like all good things, this value can also have negative expressions if left unevaluated. Love for God can become confused with what Richard Foster calls "bibliolatry." Foster says that

⁹ Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 1995), 106.

¹⁰ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 74.

¹¹ Chris Webb, *Fire in the Word: Meeting God on Holy Ground* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), Loc 274 of 2023.

¹² Chris Webb, *Fire in the Word*, Loc 1808 of 2023.

¹³ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 45.

“seldom do people plunge headlong into a literal worship of the Bible,” but acknowledges the “tendency” of evangelical cultures to be bent in this direction.¹⁴

Occupational Hazards

Missionary work is a corporate effort. Most missionaries choose a sending organization and assemble a team of financial partners and churches (investors, if you will) to fund their chosen ministry endeavor. This is not so unlike an entrepreneur who sells a novel idea to investors who hope for an eventual return on their investment. The significant difference is that what the missionary is “selling” is the gospel. In this illustration the missionary is the operating partner in a project, and the financial partners are silent investors. This all works fine when everyone feels good about the “venture” but becomes more challenging when things are difficult.

Psalms 46 begins with the assurance that “God is our refuge and strength.” One short verse later comes the context, “though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea” (Ps 46:1–2). Disruption is a “when” not an “if” in the lives of most people, and it is a significant component to soul growth. In the back of every missionary’s mind lies a question related to authenticity. Simply put, at some level missionaries need to keep partners satisfied, and letters reporting about the “earthquake” do not engender investor confidence. There is a public relations side to missions that creates an occupational quagmire for the soul. Peter Scazzerro, in *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, warns of “the lack of awareness that will come from appearing more

¹⁴ Richard Foster, *Streams in the Desert*, 230.

than (you) really are.”¹⁵ When authenticity becomes influenced by questions of financial security (or reputation or validation) the soul suffers. Exposure is a significant part of plowing the field for soul health. John’s gospel juxtaposes two stories that illustrate this point.

Hiddenness

John 2:23 describes those who were drawn to Jesus in his early ministry saying, “many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.” This would seem a cause for celebration as Jesus’ popularity grows, but the next verse reflects a very different attitude from Jesus. In spite of their apparent belief, Jesus “did not entrust himself to them” because he “knew what was in a man” (John 2:24–25). John wants his readers to understand that the appearance of a person does not always align with the reality of a person. The appearance of belief may not always flow from a heart that believes. He then provides two contrasting examples to support his point.

John 3 begins, “Now a certain man,” foreshadowing the coming story as a more specific example of the incongruity between heart and behavior referenced in 2:24–25. Nicodemus is introduced as a member of the religious elite who approaches Jesus at night. In John the Pharisees regularly claim to have knowledge, but what they think they know is not trustworthy because they perceive from a darkened understanding. Nicodemus comes in the literal darkness and immediately proclaims to Jesus what he “knows,” namely, that Jesus is a “teacher from God” who does signs and that God is

¹⁵ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 39.

obviously “with him” (John 3:2). Jesus, realizing that this knowledge is incomplete, shifts the conversation to the kingdom of God in an attempt to expose Nicodemus’s true need. Basically, Jesus says “What you think you know is not trustworthy. You have the appearance of life but you are not, in fact, alive” (John 3:3). Jesus further clarifies his point in verse six: “That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of Spirit is spirit.” He tells this respected religious teacher that he does not have the capacity to understand the ways of the kingdom or the plan of God without first coming to life spiritually. Nicodemus thinks he is alive and has all the capacity required to make a thoughtful, accurate assessment regarding Jesus. Jesus explains that he is dead and, as such, totally incapable of knowing anything. It is significant to note that this interaction concludes with the gospel taking center stage (John 3:16) while “dead” Nicodemus fades from the narrative without note of his departure. At this point in his life Nicodemus is firmly entrenched in the “I know” culture of the Pharisees. His commitment to maintain his appearance as a teacher of Israel prohibits the exposure that might bring him life.

John drives home his point with a story that contrasts that of Nicodemus in every way. Chapter three introduces a member of the religious elite lurking in the shadows. Chapter four presents a member of society’s lowest echelon in the light of day. Jesus is traveling through Samaria, the land of rejected half-breeds, when he stops at a well to refresh himself. He meets a woman drawing water in the heat of the day (not the relative cool of the evening, which would be expected), presumably because even the half-breed Samaritans think poorly of her. She is a Samaritan and a woman; two strikes on any first century social score card. As the story unfolds, the reader discovers that the very thing that gives a woman status (marriage) is absent from this woman’s life (she has had five

husbands, and her current relationship is illegitimate). This woman is on the fringe of the lowest social caste and she knows it. She and Nicodemus could not be more dissimilar, and their responses to Jesus also prove radically different.

Exposure

In contrast to Nicodemus beginning his conversation with Jesus by stating what he knows, the woman is filled with questions about Jesus. The very fact that this Jew would engage a Samaritan woman gets her attention quickly. Jesus baits her interest by transitioning the discussion from physical drink to living water. He invites the woman to deeper engagement when he says, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink...” (John 4:10). Note that Jesus says he has knowledge that is important for her to know, contrasting Nicodemus claiming to know Jesus from the outset of chapter 3. The woman continues to ask in order to understand. Jesus seems to miss the prime opportunity to gain her conversion when she asks with a sense of desperation, “Sir, give me this water” (John 4:15). He responds by asking her to get her husband (John 4:16). The theme of light and darkness (exposure) is significant throughout John’s gospel and appears here as the woman must make a choice about her personal tolerance to being exposed. In order to truly know Jesus, the woman must realize that Jesus thoroughly knows her. He forces the point by exposing her relational failure abruptly. The conversation gains emotional intensity as the woman speaks to something that she does “know,” namely, that “Messiah is coming” (John 4:25). Jesus tells her all that she needs to know simply and powerfully, “I who speak to you am he” (John 4:26).

Jesus exposes Nicodemus' inadequacy as a "teacher of Israel" (John 3:10) and invites him to look on the Son of man lifted up to find life (John 3:14–15) but Nicodemus fades into the shadows. By contrast, the woman is exposed as a relational wreck in the presence of the long anticipated Messiah and leaps into the light by going and telling the entire village, "Come see a man who told me all I ever did" (John 4:29). Exposure is the beginning of this woman's reorientation toward Jesus while Nicodemus continues to cling to pretense.

Many missionaries wrestle with "Nicodemus issues" on a regular basis. The public relations realities of missionary life make exposure a risk-filled endeavor. Missionaries must choose with care where and how they embrace exposure. They must also recognize that by drawing lines too narrowly, they run the risk of reducing personal awareness, increasing image maintenance, and ignoring significant opportunities to know Christ in the context of personal inadequacy. C.S. Lewis writes that in prayer we must, "lay before him what is in us not what ought to be in us."¹⁶ Authentic exposure bears fruit in humility, attachment to God and trust. These are issues for every soul, but they are particularly challenging for the soul of professional Christian workers whose reputation and financial stability depend, in some degree, on public perception. This occupational trap is further complicated by institutional expectations.

Institutional Complications

Many missionaries work independently. They are sent to foreign environments and asked to extend and expand their organization's strategic objectives. These objectives

¹⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), 22.

must be quantified and evaluated for progress to be measured. As a result, missionary sending agencies and church financial partners often gauge effectiveness through annual evaluations filled with questions asking about souls saved, Bible studies led, contacts made, and initiatives started. There is no way to avoid the strong “doing” ethos in these assessments, resulting in many missionaries’ struggle to validate themselves through “doing” metrics. I once had a financial partner challenge me, “My one hundred dollars buys me 10 converts in China. What does the same one hundred dollars get me with you?” This conversation reflects an understandable desire for strategic financial investment, but it is rooted in a poor understanding of stewardship, culture, and the nature of transformation. In a metrics environment it is easy to begin to neglect the less quantifiable expressions of missionary life. Few would disagree with the importance of a healthy soul for sustained and effective missionary impact, but the unstated and underlying message of most (well-intentioned) reporting tools is one of “doing” over “being” to a demographic that is predisposed in that direction anyway.

These institutional pressures combine with “doing” (work harder) temperaments to create what Peter Scazzero calls, an environment of “denial, pride, defensiveness, frenetic schedules, (and) workaholism...”¹⁷ Add to this, people who deeply believe in the cause they have chosen to serve, and it is easy to see why missionaries often find themselves getting emotional needs met through ministry success. This subtle internal addiction, when institutionally validated, creates a cause-oriented drive that ignores the need to determine and maintain healthy boundaries.

- When has enough effort been given?

¹⁷ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 43.

- Are financial partners satisfied?
- Does my supervisor (whom I only see once per year) think I am doing a good job?
- Is God pleased with me?

The ambiguity surrounding the answers to these questions often solicits a commitment to work harder...and harder...and harder. Soul care is a realm that requires space and the “hamster wheel” that spins faster and faster is not the optimal environment for a self to grow in healthy ways. One missionary commented, “I just do not linger very often before I am on to the next thing.”¹⁸ Scazzero warns, “To truly love God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength requires that we know not only God but also our interior. It takes time - lots of it.”¹⁹ Institutional pressures to produce, combined with internal needs to be validated, make the “time” to which Scazzero refers uncommon in the lives of many missionaries.

Parker Palmer confirms this need for space describing the soul as “shy” and insisting that it is not well-tended or understood in a high operational tempo.²⁰ Anselm captured the complex nature of soul care in his 11th century confession, “Oh painful dilemma! If I look into myself, I cannot endure myself. If I look not into myself, I cannot face myself. If I consider myself, my own face appalls me. If I consider not myself, my damnation deceives me. If I see myself, the horror is intolerable. If I see not myself, death is unavoidable.”²¹ The “self-ward journey” is always challenging. The occupational

¹⁸ Joy Bissonnette, Interview by author, Marzell, Germany, Feb 19, 2016.

¹⁹ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 55.

²⁰ Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness, The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 58.

²¹ James M. Houston, *The Prayer: Deepening your Friendship with God* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 2007), Loc 188 of 3230.

realities (personal, vocational, and institutional) of many missionaries create an environment that is not naturally conducive to the pace and space needed for the development and care of a healthy soul.

Incomplete Discipleship/Training Models

Standardized vernacular is often used when discussing discipleship in evangelical organizations. It is a world of quiet times, inductive Bible study, and “purpose driven” principles. These disciplines facilitate spiritual growth in many ways but often engage the rational-linear self at the expense of the emotional/relational self. The searching, parsing, dissecting, and reconfiguring of God’s Word can lead to a mastery of textual insights but miss the invitation to relationship that forms the central theme of the Scriptures. This section will identify and examine issues relevant to the development of healthy soul care models in an evangelical missions context.

Attachment Scriptures

Alex Aronis observes that the Bible contains 4 different types of insights.

- Principles Insight: Fundamental truth related to the spiritual life
 - 10 Commandments
- Attachment Insight: Encourages intimacy with God by revealing his greatness.
 - “This is my body, given for you” (Luke 22:19)
- Interior Insight: Provides increased self understanding
 - Put on the new self, created to be like God... (Eph 4:24)
- Detachment Insight: Things to “put off” or get rid of.

- But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. (Eph 5:3)

He contends that all Scripture is valuable, but because the primary purposes of God are rooted in relationship, attachment verses should be given extra attention.²² Attachment verses offer connection. These kind of verses invite the believer to union with God. Some attachment verses are direct in the invitation, and others use metaphor to paint a picture of relationship, security, and rest.

- “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden...” (Matt 11:28)
- “The Lord is my shepherd...” (Ps 23:1)
- “God is our refuge and strength...” (Ps 46:1)

These verses do not provide strong measurable metrics for doing but focus on being. It should not be a surprise that a love letter gives priority to connection over production. It must be noted that all Scripture is equally inspired and equally important to healthy, soulful living. Paul gives many behavioral instructions to the churches of the NT. In each of his letters, however, the instructions for doing follow the theology for being. This order distinction is important to the foundation of a healthy soul and to a Biblical understanding of self.

When production and achievement become the central reference point for the soul, attachment with God is based on doing enough to ensure relational security. A “doing” mindset is unstable even when achievement is significant. As the achiever is applauded for his or her accomplishments, an internal voice wonders, “Will I still be

²² Alex B. Aronis, *Developing Intimacy with God, An Eight-Week Prayer Guide Based on Ignatius' "Spiritual Exercises"* (Author House, 2003), 60-64.

valuable if I don't produce?" A behavioral focal point invites wrong thinking about sanctification. This is of particular concern for those with a doing bent. There is, most certainly, a strong Biblical priority for holy living, but right behavior is the fruit of an attached heart not the other way around. Attachment verses form the relational entry point for the obedience/behavioral orientation of Aronis's other three categories of Scripture. Choosing to use any of the other three behaviorally based scriptural categories as starting points for soul care result in a "work harder" philosophy that values doing over being. This, fundamentally, is a question of "outside-in" sanctification or "inside-out" sanctification, and it is not new. In fact, this very question was a central flashpoint of the Reformation 500 years ago.

Theological Foundations for Prioritizing the Affections

Two weeks before Martin Luther nailed the famous *95 Theses* to the Wittenberg church door, he attempted to stir a different and, in his mind, more important discussion through *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*. Years later, in his response to Erasmus who had written *Diatribes Concerning Free Will*, he expressed his belief that the issues addressed in the *Disputation* were the heart of the Reformation. Luther spoke of the more famous issues of the *95 Theses* calling them, "extraneous issues about the Papacy, purgatory, indulgences and the like-trifles rather than issues."²³ He goes on to congratulate Erasmus, "you and you alone, have seen the hinge on which all turns, and aimed for the vital spot." Ron Frost asks, "What was that vital spot? Luther was reacting to the assimilation of Aristotle's *Ethics* within the various permutations of scholastic

²³ Martin Luther on "*The Bondage of the Will*," [*De Servo Arbitrio* (1525)] (London: Clarke, 1957) 319 [WA 786].

theology that prevailed in his day.”²⁴

Scholastic Theology ruled the Christian landscape in the Middle Ages. Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologica* blended Aristotle’s Ethics with Augustine to form an expression of Christianity that Luther viewed as toxic. Frost points out that Thomistic (and thus Aristotelian) thinking had a broad impact on the church during Luther’s life, “Aristotle’s work offered much more than a benign academic methodology; his crucial definitions in ethics and anthropology shaped the thinking of young theological students in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who read the Bible and theology through the optic of his definitions.”²⁵

Central to Aristotle’s ethics was the capacity of the will and the mind to overcome flawed affections. Aristotle was a champion of the free will, for within the scope of its autonomy came man’s ability to make a meritorious choice of good over evil.²⁶ By blending Aristotle and Augustine, Thomistic (Scholastic) theology allowed for “a region of limited autonomy within God’s larger will - in which free choices, enabled by grace, display a person’s ability to “act rightly.”²⁷ Aristotle applied this philosophy pragmatically saying that the will, rightly exercised, would change the character (heart). In Book Two of *Nicomachean Ethics*, he says, “It is right, then, to say that a person comes to be just from doing just actions and temperate from doing temperate actions.”²⁸

Luther could not have more strongly disagreed with Aquinas (and Aristotle) addressing the issue directly in his *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology* (1517),

²⁴ Ron Frost, *Aristotle's Ethics: The Real Reason for Luther's Reformation*, Trinity Journal 18, (1997): 223.

²⁵ Ron Frost, *Aristotle's Ethics*, 225.

²⁶ Ron Frost, *Aristotle's Ethics*, 225.

²⁷ Ron Frost, *Aristotle's Ethics*, 227.

²⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2 ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999) 22.

thesis 40, “We do not become righteous by doing righteous deeds, but having been made righteous, we do righteous deeds. This in opposition to the philosophers.” Luther’s statement intentionally uses parallelism to make a direct connection to the sentence structure used by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*. To leave no doubt about his opinion, he adds in thesis 41, “Virtually the entire *Ethics* of Aristotle is the worst enemy of grace. This is in opposition to the scholastics.”²⁹ Luther (aligning himself with Augustine) believed that the affections (not the will) were the source of change in a person. His contention, expressed concisely through his protégé Philip Melancthon, was that sin was the result of “a depraved affection,” identifying the “dominant affection of man’s nature as self love.”³⁰ For Luther, a person’s will was not free but compelled to follow the desire of his or her heart. The anthropological implications of this are significant. The Thomistic/Scholastic model promotes a behavioral (outside-in) model of change. Correcting behavior will eventually change the character/heart. Luther placed the heart at the center of the change process. Change results from a, “greater affection that can eclipse the affections of sin.”³¹

In summary, the Scholastic model of anthropology places the will and its behavioral expressions center stage in discussions about discipleship. The will, empowered by grace, is harnessed to subdue flawed affections resulting in sanctification. A Scholastic discipleship model is attractive, in part, because it is easy to measure. The metrics of NT holy living are used to determine a desired result, and a strategy is developed to achieve the behaviors outlined in the plan. Aristotelian models of

²⁹ Luther, Martin. “*Luther’s Disputation against Scholastic Theology*.” Scholasticus. Accessed February 15, 2013.

³⁰ Ron Frost, *Aristotle’s Ethics*, 236.

³¹ Ron Frost, *Aristotle’s Ethics*, 236.

anthropology tend to see “success” in behavioral categories and can easily result in a pressure to perform well, work harder, or “get it right.” Too often, training models based on right behavior build disciples that look good on the outside but are not anchored to God intimately.

Summary

Ninety percent of an iceberg lies beneath the surface and the soul is similar. Understanding and tending a healthy soul requires attention to areas not often seen. Dag Hammarskjöld, former UN Secretary General, observed that mankind has actively explored outer space but has not had the same success with “inner space.” He contends, “The longest journey of any person is the journey inward.”³² For most this journey requires painful honesty and patient endurance. The reward for this journey comes when the soul enjoys a growing intimacy with God that can only be cultivated in environments of truth and grace.

The Poisonwood Bible portrays an extreme stereotype of an evangelical missionary in the character of Nathan who is described as “a machine. He’s on automatic pilot for God.”³³ Nathan is a caricature of all the excesses of “Knowing-Going-Doing” evangelical culture and alienates all of his relationships in the name of religious zeal. Though he is a fictional hyperbole and the stereotype over reaches in many ways, his character should serve as a cautionary example to individuals and organizations with

³² Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 72.

³³ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 70.

evangelical values and roots. Healthy knowing, going, and doing most productively flow from a soul/self that has learned to “be.”

- To be still.
- To be aware.
- To be attentive.
- To be humble.
- To be loved.

The next chapter will examine more carefully the biblical and theological foundations of such a soul and of its journey toward secure, attached “being.”

CHAPTER TWO

TOWARD A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF SELF

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a biblical, theological, and philosophical understanding of the soul. If the nature of a healthy soul in a missions context is to be addressed, it must first be understood. This is no small task. There are volumes dedicated to this subject, so the task of summarizing this expansive topic is challenging. What follows is offered in humility, as an attempt toward

- a working understanding of the image of God in man
- the implications of the calamity of the Fall
- the foundational considerations for meaningful *Imago Dei* restoration

The Image of God in Man

Scripture is clear (Gen.1:26), and Biblical scholars across the centuries agree that humans are made in the Creator's image. What is debatable concerns the nature of the image. The Bible provides only a few pegs on which to hang our interpretive understanding.

- Gen 1:26 indicates that something about the image equips man to be a steward of creation.
- Gen 2:7 specifies the breath of life being breathed into the man and his becoming a living soul (in contrast to other created animals seeming to originate from God's words).

- Ps 8:3–8 offers several poetic insights into the distinctiveness of the image of God in man.
 - Made a little lower than the heavenly beings
 - Crowned with honor and majesty
 - Given authority over creation

Beyond these few Scriptures, God’s comments are so noticeably spare concerning the particulars of the *Imago Dei* that Karl Barth commented, “One could indeed discuss which of all these and similar explanations of the term is the most beautiful or the most deep or the most serious. One cannot, however, discuss which of them is the correct interpretation of Gen. 1:26.”¹ Barth concludes that convictions about the nature of the image of God in man tend to be more influenced by the cultural values of the day than by the Biblical text.

The Self/Soul

Howard Baker points to over 1300 references in the Bible to the soul or the self, which he describes as the “real me” of a person. He further defines the soul as the seat of longings, desires and yearnings observing that, in the Bible, the soul is known by its state. A full soul is characterized by “joy, comfort and peace,” while an empty soul experiences “despair, trouble and distress.”² For Henri Nouwen the soul is that space where a person seeks worth. A healthy soul is “self accepting” based on being “the beloved” of God.³

¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, III/I* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1958), 192ff.

² Howard Baker, *Soul Keeping: Ancient Paths of Spiritual Direction* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998), 37.

³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 26.

Nouwen contends that every soul is special as is reflected in distinct longings and unique brokenness.⁴ Robert Mulholland describes the self as a space that can be filled and emptied. Paul prays in Eph 3:19 that souls would be “filled with all the fullness of God.”⁵ In this it is clear that the soul is a dynamic space within an image bearer that functions as the primary conduit for relationship with God.

Gen 1:26 forms the first subtle indication of the soul’s longing for connection. Barth observes that historically, the shift from singular to plural in this verse has been an embarrassment to scholars. Jewish scholars are said to have produced a “corrected version” of the text for Ptolemy II that read, “Let me make man in my image.”⁶ Barth insists on taking the passage literally and focuses on “us” as the central reality of the image of God placed within man. His thinking is that relationship is central to all that God is. From eternity past the Father, Son, and Spirit have been in perfect fellowship with one another. Barth contends that the image of God only exists when relationship is present as is the case eternally and perpetually in the Godhead. Perfect love, perfect unity of purpose and deferential otherness characterize the nature of the Godhead, and this image is transferred to man at his creation. According to Barth, this dimension of the *Imago Dei* is only present in man when he loves another. This meshes well with the Trinitarian thinking of the Church Fathers and explains the Apostle John’s focus on love as the highest virtue. So the image of God in man is first and foremost relational. Trinity

⁴ Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 71.

⁵ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), Loc 66 of 1753.

⁶ J. Jervell, *Imago Dei. Gen1, 26f im Spatjudentum, in der Gnosis and in den Paulinischetx Briefen* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1960), 75.

is not just the starting point of orthodoxy, but it is the foundation and central reference point as well.

Warning: Inadequate Understandings of the Nature of God

In post Christian, western culture there is a prevailing assumption that everyone who believes in God generally agrees on what this God is like. Michael Reeves identifies the problem with this thinking saying, “Given the different preconceptions people have about “God” it simply will not do for us to speak abstractly about some general “God.”⁷ He suggests that whether an individual believes in God or does not believe in God, an appropriate follow up question might be to inquire as to which God they do or do not believe in. John Calvin also saw the importance of defining God with appropriate care, saying that if Father, Son, and Spirit do not frame the understanding of who God is, then “only the bare and empty name of God flits about in our brain, to the exclusion of the true God.”⁸

The contemporary confirmation of Calvin’s 450-year-old concern can be found in a 2005 study from researchers at the University of North Carolina, at Chapel Hill. After interviewing 3000 adolescents who identified themselves as “Christian,” the researchers determined “that a significant part of Christianity in the United States is actually (only) tenuously Christian in any sense that is seriously connected to the actual historic Christian tradition.” This religious expression that researchers refer to as, “Christianity’s misbegotten step-cousin” is called “Christian Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”⁹ It is

⁷ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 17.

⁸ John Calvin, as quoted in Reeves, *Delighting*, 37.

⁹ Albert R. Mohler, “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism-the New American Religion”, April 18, 2005, accessed May 6, 2014, christianpost.com.

described as “centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, (and) at peace. It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to solve problems, and getting along amiably with other people.”¹⁰ Not surprisingly, these convictions flow from a particular image of God, “one who exists, created the world, and defines our general moral order, but not one who is particularly personally involved in one’s affairs. Most of the time, the God of this faith keeps a safe distance.”¹¹ These students have no concept of God as a relational being. While they identify as Christian, they have missed the central tenant of the faith. As a result they experience a God who is “a combination between Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist.”¹² But misconceptions of God are not unique to the 21st century.

Consider the 4th century debate between Athanasius and Arius about the nature of Jesus. Arius viewed God through the lens of Aristotle (unmoved mover) as the “Unoriginate.” Athanasius, insisted on Christ’s deity (equality with the Father) and celebrated the Father and the Son’s interdependence. The Father could not be a father without the Son, and the Son could not be a son without the Father.¹³ This dispute became the birthing room for Trinitarian theology. It can be fairly stated that the doctrine of the Trinity “was the most important theological achievement of the first five centuries of the church.”¹⁴ During that period Athanasius was among the fiercest opponents of anyone seeking to diminish the Son’s equality with the Father or the centrality of “relationship” to the essence of the Godhead.

¹⁰ Albert Mohler, *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism--the New American Religion*, Christianpost, April 18, 2005, accessed March 12, 2014, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/moralistic-therapeutic-deism-the-new-american-religion-6266/>.

¹¹ Albert Mohler, *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism*.

¹² Albert Mohler, *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism*.

¹³ Michael Reeves, *Delighting*, 20.

¹⁴ John P Whalen, as quoted in, *Rediscovering the Triune God* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 6.

If, as Arius promoted, God is a “singularity,” then he existed before creation, fully satisfied within himself. Because he is solitary, he cannot be said to be loving since love must have an object to be meaningful. This singular God must therefore create out of some type of need. He requires servants or he desires praise. In either case, he is an inwardly turned, self-absorbed deity. Michael Reeves notes that the God of Arius is not just a fourth century construct, pointing out that “when Hitler used to speak about God he called him ‘the Almighty.’”¹⁵ His point is that Hitler celebrated a club-wielding despot made in his own image. His God was a singularity with power as his central attribute. Unfortunately, many today grovel at the feet of a non-relational, distant monarch as they worship on Sunday mornings. Similarly, missionaries must be careful that the constructs of discipleship that they teach are a response to the love of a relational deity rather than subjection to a Cosmic Moral Authority figure. It is little more than Christocentric Islam that is practiced, when the Father is seen as powerful, sovereign, and easily angered and the Son graciously endures the Creator’s ire to secure the redemption of mankind.

The young monk Martin Luther knew this God of judgment, performance, and expectations. He confessed, “I did not love, yes, I hated the God.” The question must be asked of Luther, “Which God?” to which he answers, the “righteous God who punishes sinners.” It was later in his life that he realized that the God that he hated was the wrong God.¹⁶ Reeves contends that the “solitary” God of Arius is like the God that Luther hated and is functionally similar to the God served by many 21st century Christians. “We think like Arius every day. We think of God without a son.”¹⁷ His point is that Christianity is

¹⁵ Michael Reeves, *Delighting*, 19.

¹⁶ Michael Reeves, *Delighting*, 78.

¹⁷ Michael Reeves, *Delighting*, 130.

rooted in relationship, and without a robust and relevant understanding of the Trinity, rules and judgment obscure love and mercy. C. Baxter Kruger describes this solitary God as “the faceless, nameless, omni-being who watches us from the infinite distance of a disapproving heart.”¹⁸ In contrast to the self-serving God of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, the God of Arius (and all his contemporary obedience-driven expressions) is worshipped in fear and the expectation of judgment. Both views miss the centrality of relationship to the Godhead.

Genesis 2–3: Biblical Origins of the Solitary (non-relational) God

Jesus engages in a very intense conversation with the Pharisees in John 8. The discussion revolves around exposing the primary influencer of these men who claim Abraham as their Father. Jesus confronts them saying “you are from your father, the devil” and then speaks to the motivations of Satan. In verse 44 he says that, “he is a liar and the father of lies.” The literal translation of this phrase is, “he is a liar and the father of *it*” (emphasis added).¹⁹ The definite article indicates that Jesus has some specific lie in mind as he thinks about the devil. Paul picks up this idea in describing “natural man” in Rom 1:25 when he says, “they exchanged the truth of God for *the* lie” indicating a particular lie is in his mind as he writes. In 2 Thess 2:11, Paul describes the Tribulation, “God sends them a strong delusion, that they may believe *what is false*” (emphasis added). This is not a literal translation. What Paul actually wrote about this deception is “that they might believe *the lie*” (emphasis added).²⁰ “The lie” shows up in the Old

¹⁸ Baxter Kruger Interview, GCI.com, accessed April 4, 2014, with Paul Young, New Relationship with God.

¹⁹ “Lumina”, Bible.org, May 7, 2014, <https://lumina.bible.org/bible/John+8>.

²⁰ “Lumina”, Constable’s Notes, Bruce, 64.

Testament as well. In Isa 28:15, Israel boasts about being safe from danger (metaphorically, “the whip”) having, “made lies our refuge and in falsehood we have taken shelter.” Similar to the New Testament passages, it is literally “a lie” that they have made their refuge. That is made even clearer in God’s response through the prophet several verses later as he sends hail to “sweep away the refuge of lies” (Isa 28:17). Again, this is literally, “the refuge of *the lie*.”²¹

The origin of “the lie” is found in Genesis 3. The serpent calls into question God’s trustworthiness and then speaks to Eve “the lie” that will be the undoing of the relationships in the garden and the foundation for all that is false (from Arius to Moral Therapeutic Deism) in the future: “You will not die, ...but will be like God” (Gen 3:4–5). “The lie” is that God is not trustworthy, so people should rely on themselves. In essence, the serpent tells Eve that God is not lovingly relational but only looks after his own interests. If she does not, similarly, take care of her own interests, she will be missing out on something. In believing “the lie,” Adam and Eve become self-serving, breaking their relationship with God and undermining the union of Gen 2.

Trinitarian Beauty Lost

It was only natural for the Father, Son, and Spirit’s perfect eternal mutuality to bubble over into the physical expression indicated in the Creation narrative. Their love was so profound that its logical expression was to expand more broadly. Adam and Eve enter the Biblical story as partakers in the eternal goodness and love of Father, Son, and Spirit, created, not out of need (for slaves or groupies), but out of a “free choice borne of

²¹ “Lumina”, Bible.org, May 7, 2014, <https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Isaiah+28>.

nothing but love.”²² The Godhead initiated a relationship between “unequals”²³ in which Adam and Eve were invited to fellowship with the Trinity. The apostle John begins his 1st Epistle with a powerful Trinitarian reminder to his audience, saying, “...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (ESV). John lives in union with God. Because he is in Christ, he is invited into the Trinitarian relationship.

For Creation’s first couple, embracing “the lie” introduced a self-centered expression into this fellowship that was, in fact, death. Reeves says, “it was not that Adam and Eve stopped loving. They were created as lovers in the image of God, and they could not undo that. Instead, their love *turned*.”²⁴ “The lie” is expressed in what Martin Luther called “concupiscence” or self-love.²⁵ Self-love leaves Adam and Eve in what Baxter Kruger calls “the tragic nightmare of self-referential confusion.”²⁶ Kruger expands on the implications of believing “the lie” saying, “The great disaster of Adam and Eve was not simply that they sinned or were disobedient to a divine rule. The disaster was that in believing the lie of the evil one, they became blind. Their perception of reality became skewed, so skewed that they could no longer perceive the real truth about God or about themselves.”²⁷

²² Michael Reeve, *Delighting*, 48.

²³ Eugene Peterson, *Tell it Slant: A Conversation on the Language of Jesus in his Stories and Prayers* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 266.

²⁴ Michael Reeves, *Delighting*, 64.

²⁵ Ron Frost, Spreading Goodness Blog, March 24, 2014.

²⁶ C. Baxter Kruger, *The Shack Revisited*, (New York, NY: Faith Words, 2012), 143.

²⁷ C. Baxter Kruger, *The Shack Revisited*, 139.

Graphic Journey Through Genesis 1–3

At this point it might be helpful to diagram the relational realities of Genesis 1-3.

The relational image of the Trinity is depicted in *Figure 1*:²⁸



Figure 1: Trinity Graphic

The diagram illustrates the Father’s orientation toward the Son and the Son’s toward the Father. The Spirit facilitates this loving communion. Gregory of Nanzianus, one of the Cappadocian Fathers, wrote about the Trinity in the late fourth century when he said, “No sooner do I conceive the One than I am illumined by the splendor of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One.”²⁹ Michael Reeves clearly describes the affections and roles that exist in the Trinity, “the Father has eternally delighted in the Son through the Spirit, and the Son in the Father.”³⁰ At the heart of the Trinity is an attentiveness/love for another. A vision of the splendid unity of the Godhead is the starting point of God’s revelation of himself in Gen 1:26. Adam and Eve

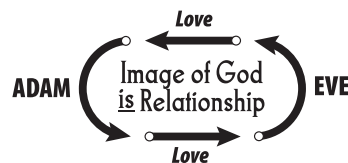


Figure 2: Relationship in Genesis 2

²⁸ Peter Mead, January 15, 2014, *Gospel of John Intensive*, COR DEO, Chippenham, UK.

²⁹ Collin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 149. Quoted in Eugene Peterson, *Tell It Slant: A Conversation on the Language of Jesus in his Stories and Prayers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008), 228.

³⁰ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 87.

are intended for the same secure, loving other orientation enjoyed by the Trinity. This is reflected in *Figure 2*.

Curt Thompson discusses a developmental process in infants called “mentalizing” that is crucial to the growth of secure relational attachments. Mentalizing is “the imaginative mental activity that enables us to sense and interpret the feelings, desires and intentions of another person.”³¹ When a baby is born, her sense of self is a reflection of what she senses, touches, and feels from her primary care givers. Thompson says, the self of the child develops securely or insecurely “based on what she sees in her mother’s eyes.”³² A root source of her identity comes from mimicking and internalizing what she experiences. He goes on to point out that this is a key component in the development of empathy (which no one is born with).³³

The image of God is breathed into man in Gen 2:7 in an ontological way. Adam and Eve learn about the relational image of God in an experiential way by mentalizing what they observe in and from the Trinity. They learn empathy by watching and experiencing an others-orientation in the Father, Son, and Spirit. As a result, the same empathetic others-orientation forms the foundation of their relationship in Gen 2. Karl Barth adds this observation to the conversation: “The essential nature in a person mirrors the essential nature of the creator (love) in that a ‘self’ can only be whole in the presence of another ‘self’ where love is both given and received.”³⁴ David Benner adds, “Genuine self-knowledge begins by looking at God and noticing how God is looking at us.”³⁵ Like

³¹ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy*, 116.

³² Curt Thompson, *Anatomy*, 117.

³³ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy*, 116.

³⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, III vols. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1958), 192.

³⁵ David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Art of Self Discovery* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2004), 47.

the infant who is imprinted by the reflection of her caregiver's love, so Adam and Eve were marked by the image and imaging of the Trinity. It is important to note that a highly developed theology of Trinity cannot be supported from the text in these early chapters of Scripture, but it is appropriate to insert the fuller New Testament understanding into this early revelation of God.

At the end of Gen 2 Adam and Eve reflect the secure self that was breathed into them and modeled for them. It is interesting to ponder how exactly Adam and Eve might have described their self-awareness at this point. Certainly it would involve words like “beloved,” “peaceful,” and “secure” and would find expression in an outward moving, loving orientation. All that changes in Gen 3 as is reflected in *Figure 3*.



Figure 3: Relationship in Genesis 3, Self love

Gen 3 introduces broken relationship between man and woman and between humanity and God. Separation, fear, and hiddenness combine to form a toxic poison that infects mankind with a new and terrible perspective on self. The “death” that God warns Adam about (Gen 2:17) is the fracturing of perfect relationships. The end of Gen 3 finds Adam and Eve fearful, hiding, and blaming one another for the situation. They are focused on self-preservation, and their lives and loves are turned in upon themselves. Pre-fall, the “self” was never the focus. In the same way that the members of the Godhead are eternally and lovingly preoccupied with one another, Adam and Eve were fulfilled whole

selves. With sin comes self-awareness, a self that has wandered from love based “othering.” Is it any wonder that self-protection, self-management, and striving so quickly become central to the human narrative? Adam’s words are powerfully and tragically concise in his post-fall summary of his condition, “I was afraid so I hid myself” (Gen 3:10). As the genealogies multiply, the reader experiences growing themes of competition, judgment, and fear reflected by a culture of self-wardness, punctuated by episodes of God’s intervention (sometimes punishment, sometimes promise) and invitation to restored relationship.

The self-orientation of mankind offers the promise of control and protection but fails to acknowledge that man is often his own worst enemy. Plato observes that, “Man is by nature, his own friend” but also recognizes that, “this great friendship for self is for each the cause of all missteps.” James Houston goes a step further in identifying selfishness as, “rebellion against the way we were created, a distortion of the original image and of His goal in restoration.”³⁶ When selfish survivalism replaces Trinitarian fellowship, nothing good happens. At this point, the self is renegade and fighting for its own survival. This self-orientation is described by Russian contemplative, Theophan the Recluse, using a wood working illustration. With self as the central reference point, man is “like a thin shaving of wood, curling up around the void of his inner nothingness, cut off alike from the cosmos and the creator of all things.”³⁷ At the end of Gen 3 Adam and Eve are left with what A.W. Tozer calls “the fine threads of the self-life, the hyphenated

³⁶ James M. Houston, *The Prayer: Deepening Your Friendship with God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications Ministries, 2007) Amazon.com, January 2013, Loc 750 of 3230.

³⁷ James Houston, *The Prayer*, Loc 2220 of 3230.

sins of the human spirit.”³⁸ Richard Foster spells these self-sins out as “self-sufficiency, self pity, self-absorption...self-deception, self-deprecation,... self-indulgence,...and a host of others just like them.”³⁹

Summary of “the lie”

The Creation/Fall narrative exposes “*the lie*” as not fundamentally about rule breaking, but about hearts that turn away from God, destroy trust (fellowship), and strive desperately to find security in self. It is important to have a clear understanding of the problem facing mankind at the end of Gen 3 as it informs the way toward restoring what was lost. If rule breaking (an affront to God’s holiness) is seen to be the primary issue of the Fall, then the goal of restoration is rule following (making man behaviorally acceptable to God once again). If the result of the Fall is a broken relationship and a wayward heart, then sanctification must be pursued through the affections. This author contends that the later is the most accurate way to understand the Biblical narrative.

Restoring Relationship: Imago Dei as both Noun and Verb

For Christians, being an image bearer is both a central identity and a working job description as is pointed out by Reverend Angus Steward with power and precision. “The image of God is a gift that implies a command: ‘You are created after God’s image. Therefore, image Him.’ Those who are God’s image must and do image Him. Thus ‘image’ is both a noun and a verb. Sanctification is viewed as increasingly imaging Christ

³⁸ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, n.d.), 45 as quoted in Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* (San Francisco, CA: HarperColinsPublishers, 1992), 95.

³⁹ Foster, *Finding the Hearts True Home*, 95.

(2 Cor. 3:18), the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4).”⁴⁰ Steward highlights the image of God as both ontological and dynamic in nature. Certainly, the Father can no longer look upon the fallen image bearer and wholeheartedly pronounce the situation “good.” So he did the unthinkable in becoming both judge and justifier at the cross. In Eph 5:1–2, the apostle Paul instructs the Ephesian church, “Therefore, be imitators of God as dearly loved children (and what will imitation look like?) and live a life of love, just as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God” (New English Translation). It is important to note that the motivation for the energy of imitating God is relational. We are family, and as such (dearly loved children) we mimic our Father. Baxter Kruger joins this discussion with an important observation, “What Jesus has made us in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension is the truth of our being, but it has not yet become the way of our being.”⁴¹ So what does the dynamic restoration process of an image bearer look like? The next section will identify four key foundations for understanding a healthy biblical self.

Four Components of a Healthy Self:

The four components of a healthy self that are discussed in the following pages influence the structure of this thesis-project. Note that the four components are reflected in the weekly themes of the Being Project (chapter four).

1. The love of God is central to any sustainable sense of Christian self. The philosophical and theological conviction that God is pursuing man’s affections

⁴⁰ Angus Steward, *The Image of God: A Reformed Reassessment*, <http://www.cprf.co.uk/artilces/imageofgod>.

⁴¹ Baxter Kruger, *Shack Revisited*, 183.

(heart) is important to the foundation of the discussion. If God is primarily interested in behavior modification, then models of sanctification will lean in the direction of “righteous doing.” If, as this project contends, God is wooing the hearts of his fallen image bearers, then growth will only occur when righteous “being” precedes doing. This is of particular significance when applied to a culture steeped in righteous causes.

2. A healthy self is one that is aware, attentive, and examined. This is much more than psychological navel gazing and embraces the medium of emotion as an important component of God’s communication. Curt Thompson contends, “If we ignore, deny, or debate these feelings, we are ignoring God’s messengers.”⁴² Calvin adds, “Without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God. Without knowledge of God, there is no knowledge of self.”⁴³ Thompson’s contribution to the understanding of the soul will be carefully evaluated in chapter three.
3. The soul cannot be defined in isolation but only in respect to its relationships. Soul health is deeply impacted by the presence of community. Martin Buber observes that the “I” of every person is defined by the object of its attention. A soul finds identity only through the presence of a “You.”⁴⁴ Because God is Trinity and his relational nature is reflected in each of his image bearers, it is no surprise that any meaningful discussion of the praxis of soul health must be infused liberally with words such as “us” and “we.”

⁴² Curt Thompson, *Anatomy*, 96.

⁴³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John Thomas McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 20-21 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1961), 1.1.2.

⁴⁴ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 112.

4. As image bearers we are designed (like the Trinity) to be outwardly oriented. The natural expression of the Trinity's loving mutuality overflowed into the act of creating image bearers. Similarly, a divinely loved self overflows in outward blessings and service. Contemporary culture is replete with examples of people lost in themselves. That is not the goal of the Christian self. Timothy Keller says, "Nothing makes us more miserable than self absorption, the endless, unsmiling concentration on our needs, wants, treatment, ego, and record."⁴⁵ He goes on to say that health and wholeness are found "not in thinking more of myself or of thinking less of myself," but in "thinking about myself less."⁴⁶ The healthy Christian self will always be a given self.

Beloved Self (God is After the Heart of Man)

Ignatius of Loyola is well known for his rigorous devotional the "Spiritual Exercises." He is said to have advised would-be participants to spend two to three years meditating on the love of God before committing to the Exercises. His thinking was that only God's love could prepare the heart for unfettered access.

Scriptural Priority of the Heart

As has been previously highlighted, the creation is an overflow of Trinitarian love. Similarly, the relational heart of God was breathed into man, and the ongoing narrative of the Bible is filled with a heart-centric focus. Several examples are worth highlighting in the Old Testament.

⁴⁵ Timothy Keller, *Reason for God* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2008), 217.

⁴⁶ Timothy Keller, *The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness* (Chorely, UK: 10Publishing, 2012), LOC 273 of 430.

- Pharaoh's stubborn unresponsiveness to the request of Moses to set the Hebrew slaves free was an extension of a "hard heart." (Exod 7:14)
- The Law defines the history of the Old Covenant, but even under the Law God wanted obedience to flow from his followers "heart and soul." (Deut 26:16 & Josh 22:5)
- There are several prophetic moments in the Old Testament that point toward a hopeful future when "God will cleanse your heart so that you can love him with your mind and being" (Deut 30:6). Ezek 36:26–27 indicates that in that day a new heart will express itself in joyful obedience, not obligatory subjection to the Law.
- Similarly, the OT sacrificial system is understood by David to be a useless ritual without heart based humility and repentance (Ps 51:16–17) For David, "being" proceeds and infuses meaning into "doing."
- Proverbs is a collection of pragmatic moral lessons. But even the pragmatism of the Proverbs recognizes the primacy of the heart:
 - "Let my heart keep your commandments." (Prov 3:1)
 - "Guard your heart with vigilance for from it are the sources of life." (Prov 4:23)
 - "As in water the face is reflected as a face, so a person's heart reflects the person." (Prov 27:19)
- The prophet Joel writes to disobedient Israel with attention to inward repentance rather than outward displays of contrition saying, "...return to me with all your heart. Tear your hearts, not just your garments!" (Joel

2:12)

The New Testament speaks even more pointedly to the priority of the heart. Jesus says that he came not to retract the law but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17). By this, he means that the reclamation and engagement of the heart completes the picture of restored relationship between man and God.

- For Jesus, sin is an issue of the heart expressed in bad choices.
 - “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matt 5:28)
 - “For the heart of this people has become dull; they are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes....” (Matt 13:15)
 - “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me....” (Matt 15:8)
 - “For out of the heart come evil ideas, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.” (Matt 15:19)

Similarly, the NT presents reconnection with God via love as its highest priority.

- “Jesus said to him, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’” (Matt 23:37)
- “But the aim of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.” (1 Tim 1:5)
- Central to the Biblical understanding of the heart is God’s role as initiator of love. This is clearly expressed in Jesus’s parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) and John’s statement, “We love him because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)

Affective Anthropology

Affective anthropology places the heart at the center of an individual's being and understands transformation through the lens of responsiveness to God's love. A person's lesser loves are captured by greater loves. God is always the initiator in affective theology. The role of humanity is simply that of attentive responsiveness. Toward that end, the activity of sanctification is never "working harder" but looks more like paying closer attention. Ps 27 invites the believer to "gaze upon the beauty of the Lord." In this text "gazing" (seeing God in his splendor) results in "seeking" (an appetite to be connected with the Lord). Right behavior is the natural response of an attentive, responsive heart. Jonathan Edwards said, "True religion, in great part, consists of holy affections." Michael Reeves unpacks what Edwards is communicating when he says, "What we love and enjoy is fundamentally important. It is far more significant than our outward behavior, for it is our desires that drive our behavior. We do what we want."⁴⁷ God is first and foremost concerned with winning the hearts (affections) of his children. John Owen was convinced of this saying, "If the heart be once much taken up with the eminency of the Father's love, it cannot choose but be overpowered, conquered and endeared unto him."⁴⁸

Aware Self

Scripture is clear that the realm of the heart can be a confusing place. It describes the heart as "deceitful" and defying understanding (Jer 17:9). Certainly, the nature of our inward self is filled with subjective emotional data, and paying attention to it can be

⁴⁷ Michael Reeves, *Delighting*, 98-99.

⁴⁸ Michael Reeves, *Delighting*, 97.

personally disorienting. The daunting task of understanding the heart does not diminish the central priority of attending to it. The journey toward healthy self-understanding requires dealing with personal pain, false identity, and issues of trust. Awareness must be purposed for a soul to find wholeness. It is important to differentiate between the inward turned self love of Genesis 3 and the purposed internal awareness to notice and attend to the pathologies birthed by such self love. Both might be loosely described as self awareness as they involve inward examination. They are, however, diametrically opposed to one another in that the Gen 3 expression is self serving, while the inward awareness that will be addressed in this section exposes what is real about the self to the transforming power of the gospel.

Brené Brown, a shame and vulnerability researcher from the University of Houston says most people's struggle with shame makes them feel "unworthy of love, belonging or connection."⁴⁹ People develop a suit of armor to protect their perceived vulnerability, but wearing the armor prohibits the very experience of relationship that they long for.⁵⁰ She warns against the seductive attraction of being "perfect or bulletproof."⁵¹ This is the battle with the false self, and its origins can be traced as far back as Adam and Eve sewing clothing for themselves to cover their shame. A more thorough evaluation of Brown's research will be included in chapter 3.

Getting Past False Self

⁴⁹ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly* (New York, NY: Gotham Books, 2012), 68.

⁵⁰ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 7.

⁵¹ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 2.

Robert Mulholland describes the false self as a “pervasive and deeply engrained matrix of self referenced being.”⁵² This definition is an echo of Luther’s description of sin as *man turned in upon himself*.⁵³ Mulholland finds the false self in the biblical narrative of the Tower of Babel as humanity creates a “self generated structure for life.” In doing so, “they seem to recognize that any viable structure for human existence must involve God. But God is involved in their structure on their terms.”⁵⁴ The false self in Christian environments often acknowledges God but seldom surrenders to Him. David Benner sees the false self as having its roots in disengagement, observing that it grows “in the soil of self ignorance.”⁵⁵ He says “what we call “I” is really a family of many part selves” and that problems arise because “these part-selves are unknown to us.”⁵⁶

The Courage to Look in the Mirror

Knowing self is a function of personal engagement and social engagement. It requires courage to see ourselves as we really are. Henri Nouwen would identify with Brown’s caution about “bullet proof” living saying that all self-exploration begins with the simple observation, “You are a broken man.” This honest observation is the crucial starting point for dealing with the false self.⁵⁷ Psychologist Carol Dweck encourages an awareness of one’s “internal monologue.”⁵⁸ Dweck is not addressing soul formation in her observation, but the practice is very helpful in terms of identifying the voices of

⁵² Robert Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, Loc 410 of 1753.

⁵³ Alan J. Torrance, "The Self-Relation, Narcissism and the Gospel of Grace," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40, no. 4 (1987), 484.

⁵⁴ Robert Mulholland, *Deeper Journey*, Loc 234 of 1753.

⁵⁵ Brené Benner, *Gift*, 21.

⁵⁶ Brené Benner, *Gift*, 53.

⁵⁷ Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 69.

⁵⁸ Carol S. Dweck Ph.D, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2008), 225.

Benner's "part selves," Nouwen's "brokenness," and Brown's shame that hide just beneath the armor.

The false self must be identified and engaged not ignored or avoided. Military training for soldiers encountering an ambush is counterintuitive. If a company of soldiers is attacked by surprise, natural instinct suggests running away from the conflict. The exact opposite action is what is required. The group of soldiers being attacked should orient themselves toward the aggressors and run through the line of attack. Benner lays important groundwork for discussing engagement with the false self saying, "Until we are willing to accept the unpleasant truths of our existence, we rationalize or deny responsibility for our behavior."⁵⁹ Mulholland adds that, "Repentance is not being sorry for the things you have done, but being sorry that you are the kind of person that does such things." This is the beginning of identifying and dealing with the false self.⁶⁰

The false self is fundamentally a "decentered human existence" that has "lost the center of human identity in loving union with God."⁶¹ The way forward is one of integration. Howard Baker sees spiritual transformation as a journey of "peaks and valleys" designed to continually invite the wandering self to know the presence of God.⁶² The wandering self is a reality for every soul. It need not be hidden. Nouwen affirms this, saying that being the "beloved" involves knowing God's love in our brokenness. Benner adds, "Self-acceptance always precedes genuine self surrender and self transformation."⁶³ Soul growth requires the discipline of regularly looking in the mirror. Toward that end,

⁵⁹ Brené Benner, *Gift*, 59.

⁶⁰ Robert Mulholland, *Deeper Journey*, Loc 171 of 1753.

⁶¹ Robert Mulholland, *Deeper Journey*, Loc 237 of 1753.

⁶² Howard Baker, *Soul Keeping*, 68.

⁶³ Brené Benner, *Gift*, 58.

Curt Thompson asks, “How well am I paying attention to what I am paying attention to?”⁶⁴

The Scripture is filled with invitations to be aware. When David asks God for an “undivided heart,” it is precisely because he has taken the time to realize that his heart is, in fact, divided. The Bible is brimming over with “fear nots” because the nature of the false self is filled with anxiety. The psalmist invites God to “search me and know me” and reveal the “wicked ways in me,” assuming that the heart is challenging to understand. Undergirding all of these Scriptures is an understanding that brokenness is a normative condition for fallen image bearers. When this condition is denied or ignored, growth stops. Fortunately, it is not a terminal condition. For the self-aware believer, brokenness provides the perfect conditions to grow a healthy self. Imperfections can become avenues to know the love of Christ more intimately. Perhaps God is not as deeply concerned about “getting life right” as many traditions would lead us to believe. How else could David be called “a man after God’s own heart”?

It is important to note that individuals can become absorbed in their flaws and inadequacies. The self-aware believer cannot become so deeply committed to sifting flaws and identifying personal failures that he or she becomes a solitary reference point. Benner highlights the essential place of God in self-awareness saying, “Genuine self knowledge begins by looking at God and noticing how God is looking at us.”⁶⁵ Only in the intimate gaze of the love of God does the human soul find rest. The image of the healthy soul progressively imitates the loving perspective of the Father. Robert Bellah provides an important segue to the next component of the true self when he

⁶⁴ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy*, 53.

⁶⁵ Brené Benner, *Gift*, 42.

acknowledges the value of community saying, “We never get the bottom of ourselves on our own.”⁶⁶

Connected Self

It might be accurate to describe sanctification as a “team sport” in that Scripture encourages Christians to help one other toward wholeness. Timothy Keller makes an important confession when he says I have “learned to have a very low opinion of my opinion of me.”⁶⁷ Most people carry baggage that slants their perspective on themselves and results in what Peter Scazzero calls “ugly gaps” that cause problems in spiritual formation. Identifying these gaps is best done in trusted community where the soul grows toward self-understanding through proximity to other forming selves.

Brené Brown’s sociological research confirms, “Connection...is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives.”⁶⁸ She further observes that humanity is “psychologically, emotionally, cognitively and spiritually hardwired for connection, love and belonging.”⁶⁹ Scientist Curt Thompson confidently states, “The neuroscience is clear: the concept of a single functioning neuron or a single functioning brain simply does not exist in nature.”⁷⁰ Both these researchers point to relational connection as a central need in every person. Simply put, the soul cannot be defined in isolation but only in respect to its relationships.

⁶⁶ Howard Baker, *Soul Keeping*, 142.

⁶⁷ Timothy Keller, *The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness*, LOC 230 of 430.

⁶⁸ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 68.

⁶⁹ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 79.

⁷⁰ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy*, 112.

Martin Buber contributes to the discussion saying that the “I” of every person is defined by the object of its attention. A soul finds identity only through the presence of a “You.”⁷¹ Neither Buber nor Brown writes from an evangelical platform (though both integrate many Judeo-Christian values), but it is not difficult to align much of their thinking with Biblical principles. Likely both would agree with Karl Barth, that the image of God in humankind is not solitary but based on relationship. The essential nature in a person mirrors the essential nature of the creator (love). A “self” can only be whole in the presence of another “self” where love is both given and received.⁷² Brown, Thompson, and Buber bring important observations to the nature and development of the soul. Each will be more deeply considered in chapter three.

Buber contends that “I-You” moments, where souls encounter one another, make (and keep) us human. This is why it is significant to notice when such moments arise. This is particularly important in doing cultures where value can be based on production. A healthy soul has an awareness of moments where knowing and being known take priority over any sense of measurable accomplishment. Toward this end, attentive listening and honest story telling are powerful formation skills. “Johari’s Window”⁷³ provides a graphic expression how of these skills impact the formation of a healthy soul.

⁷¹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970) 112.

⁷² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, III vols. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1958), 192.

⁷³ J. Luft, H. Ingham, “*The Johari window, a graphic model of interpersonal awareness.*” *Proceedings of the western training laboratory in group development* (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1950).



Figure 4: The Johari Window

Source: J. Luft, H. Ingham, "The Johari window, a graphic model of interpersonal awareness." Proceedings of the western training laboratory in group development (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1950).

George McDonald asks God, "O give me light that I might live with open eyes."⁷⁴

Eph 5:8 commands believers to "live as children of light." McDonald's quote and Paul's command provide a helpful overlay to integrating the Johari Window as a useful grid for understanding the priority of connection for a healthy self. In this variation on the Johari theme, growing in Christ is the result of submitting more and more of oneself to the light of Christ.

Box one in this model represents that part of self that is exposed to the light. The model acknowledges three other categories where self is not exposed to Christ's light. Box two represents personal blind spots. In box two, others see what the individual does not. Box three represents parts of the self that the individual knows but, for some reason, does not expose to the light. This is the box where secrets or shaming events exist. Box four embraces the reality that there are parts of the self that are simply not known at all. These areas remain in the category of mystery and simply cannot be known this side of heaven.

⁷⁴ James Houston, *The Prayer*, Loc 2856 of 3230.

Luft and Ingham contend that growth happens when box one expands and the understanding of self increases. The Christian adaptation of this idea is that the believer grows as the light of Christ invades all areas of the self. In order to decrease the size of box two, the believer asks trusted friends to speak into areas of unawareness. The individual listens to both the glory and the brokenness submitting both to Christ. This requires humility and trust. Box three is the “hidden box.” This box shrinks by storytelling. If the blind spots of box two have the possibility of pushing people away, then the secrets that “live” in box three can result in a paralyzed and isolated self. Within the body of Christ these secrets are told, and believers experience grace, love, and support. The value of storytelling is also supported by neuroscientific research.

Curt Thompson describes the power of attentive listening to redefine stories previously considered shameful, “Remember there is no such thing as an individual brain. Transformation requires a collaborative interaction, with one person empathetically listening and responding to the other so that the speaker (has) the experience, perhaps for the first time, of feeling felt by another.”⁷⁵ The experience of “feeling felt” by another cannot be minimized. Neuro-research indicates that attentive, empathetic listening is significant in re routing neural firing patterns that have been attached to specific events. In essence, the storyteller offers the story with the expectation of a certain response. The linear, sequential side of the storyteller’s brain expects to receive reflected shame from a listener when recounting stories previously associated with shame. When a listener engages with empathy and compassion, the storyteller’s right brain (emotion, relationship, creativity) can actually be surprised. Stories that once prompted negative

⁷⁵ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy*, 137.

feelings of isolation can be neurologically remapped, resulting in positive soul growth for both the teller and the listener.⁷⁶ Thompson concludes, “From two minds emerges a process that leaves (the storyteller) feeling more connected and coherent, less alone, and most important, less fearful of being present with the emotion she has just experienced.”⁷⁷

As box one increases in size (through asking questions and telling stories) boxes two and three decrease, and box four (that which is not known) proportionally diminishes also. It is important to note that God’s love equally invades all four boxes, but the believer’s ability to receive and live in that love is a box one experience. A larger box one also translates to a growing self-integration that James Huston calls “holy simplicity” and defines as, “...a life that has become simple in its wholeness and integrity, its devotion and inner freedom; a life that simply belongs to God alone. Our thoughts and actions, our words and deeds are no longer divided but are fused together in a way of life that is for God and in God. We become one with ourselves in God.”⁷⁸ This model of connection leads to a greater self-awareness, less isolation, and an ever increasing sense of holistic integrity. The Bible, philosophers, sociologists, and scientists agree. The journey toward wholeness of the self should not be attempted alone.

Given Self

The essence of the Godhead is love. That is why *Trinity* is so central to Christian theology. From eternity past the Father has always loved the Son and the Spirit.

⁷⁶ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy*, 78.

⁷⁷ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy*, 99.

⁷⁸ James Houston, *The Prayer*, Loc 711 of 3230.

Likewise, the Son loves the Father and Spirit, and the Spirit, the Son and the Father. The natural overflow of the self-secure, others-bent love of the Trinity was creation. *Love cannot be possessed!* It must always move outward in service, blessing and affirmation. In a very real sense the “given self” is the “Christ’s love compels us” (2 Cor 5:14) overflow of the previous three components of a healthy soul. When a soul is loved, it has the security to “not look to its own interests but also the interests of others “ (Phil 2:4). Internal attentiveness creates an awareness of ourselves and an awareness of God. The context of the love received is not based on accomplishment but is given by God without restraint to “the wobbly and weak-kneed who know they don’t have it altogether...for inconsistent, unsteady disciples whose cheese is falling off their cracker.”⁷⁹ Humble empathy is the fertile ground for the joy-filled, given soul.

Henri Nouwen observes, “beyond all our desires to be appreciated, rewarded and acknowledged, there lies a simple and pure desire to give.” That desire is often obscured in a fast paced culture that tends to live as if “happiness depends on having.”⁸⁰ A given soul must reject what Stephen Covey calls the “Scarcity Mentality” (hording resources and recognition) and embrace an “Abundance Mentality” believing that there is plenty out there for everybody.”⁸¹ Nouwen describes the vision of the given self, alluding to the principle of abundance seen as Jesus feeds the masses, “How different would our world be if we could believe that every little act of faithfulness, every gesture of love, every

⁷⁹ Brennen Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 1990), “A Word Before”.

⁸⁰ Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 87.

⁸¹ Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2004), 219.

word of forgiveness, every little bit of joy and peace will multiply and multiply as long as there are people to receive it...and that-even then-there will be leftovers!”⁸²

A cautionary note needs to be inserted in regard to the nature of the given soul. There are many Biblical stories, countless historical examples and, likely, multiple personal experiences that come to mind where good deeds were used as bargaining chips to secure the love and approval of God. For the healthy soul giving flows from the “nothing left to prove” security of a loved self. Jon Lynch warns that living in light of God’s pleasure easily morphs into the frantic attempt to keep him pleased.⁸³ Any attempt to earn love is toxic to the healthy self. Curt Thompson is critical of any performance-oriented reading of Luke 3:22 (You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased). “What if Jesus life was first and foremost a response to his acute awareness of Yahweh’s affection?”⁸⁴ The giving of a healthy self is simply a joyful response to the Father’s unmerited affection not an attempt at merit.

Lastly, what is the nature of the given soul’s gift? Nouwen speaks pointedly to this issue when he says, “Our life itself is the greatest gift to give.” In this way the healthy soul comes full circle in mimicking the heart of Trinity in an others-orientation willing to lay down his or her life. Nouwen also delineates talents from gifts. In his experience serving profoundly handicapped people in the Les Arche community, he observed that many did not possess talents, but all offered significant gifts like friendship, joy, kindness, forgiveness, gentleness, love, and hope. He concludes by pointedly

⁸² Henri Nouwen, *Beloved*, 98.

⁸³ Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, Jon Lynch *True Faced: trust God and others with who you really are.* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 51.

⁸⁴ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy*, 144.

observing that the most important question for the given self is, “Not what can we offer but who can we offer?”⁸⁵

Summary

A healthy self is one that is intimately connected to God. This was the Trinity’s intent at the Creation, and it is what was lost in the Fall. The soul is designed to image the Trinity in giving and receiving love. A depraved, fallen soul is one whose love has been reoriented away from God and others and toward itself. This is the essence of the death promised by God to Adam if he ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). The redemption of a soul through Christ’s death and resurrection is fundamentally restoring lost relationship. The fruit of that reconnection is expressed in holy living. Without a restored heart even behaviors that appear righteous flow from self-centered desire. Jesus addressed the incongruity between heart and life among the religious leaders in the first century with some of his most passionate challenges. In Matt 23 he uses metaphors such as “white-washed tombs” and cups that looked externally clean but were internally filthy to expose this “play acting” (hypocrisy). Jesus wanted their affections not the empty shell of their behavioral conformity to religious expectations.

The affections are the starting point for all sustained spiritual transformation. A heart attached to God will always bear fruit in a life lived for God. But transformation does not happen in a single moment. Imaging God is both the design and the direction of a healthy soul. Growth is a dynamic process that starts with the experience of being “the beloved” and continues inwardly, letting the love of God penetrate the deepest bastions of

⁸⁵ Henri Nouwen, *Beloved*, 91.

the “false self.” The process involves exposure to God and to trusted companions as the loved self invites the assistance of the people of God and the Spirit of God to apply the Word of God to the deepest parts of the identity. Sanctification is an ongoing reorientation of the soul where the ever initiating love of the Trinity confronts inwardly turned selfishness and invites others-bent givenness.

CHAPTER THREE

GLEANINGS

Introduction

This chapter aims to engage the thoughts of four authors who have significantly contributed or are contributing to discussions surrounding the nature of the self/soul and the dynamic process of keeping it healthy. It is intentionally multi-disciplinary, engaging both theological and secular perspectives. A quick search on *Amazon.com* of the term “soul care” produces 12 Internet pages of books addressing the subject. Thorough evaluation of all the literature on the subject is impossible. The authors selected for this chapter have been filtered through several evaluation grids.

- All are champions of relational connection as the central access point for soul worth, wholeness, and productivity.
- Each makes contributions to the soul care discussion which are uniquely relevant to the western cultural context and the Christian evangelical context.
- They bracket the soul, bringing four diverse, professional voices to the discussion (sociologist, philosopher, neuroscientist, theologian) and arriving at surprisingly complementary conclusions.
- Several bring objective, measurable data to a topic that resists metrics and is normally considered subjective.

The Current Landscape of Soul Care

Eugene Peterson says that, “Most of the people that we deal with most of the time

are dominated by a sense of self, not a sense of God.”¹ James Houston identifies a host of cultural forces at work that perpetuate “a new religious mobility”, causing many to abandon institutions and denominations in search of “self.”² The fixation on the self is not difficult to observe (or criticize) in current culture, but it provides new prospects of engagement as conversations move beyond social media posts and into the deeper longings of the soul. There is a significant opportunity for wise, loving soul shepherds to engage this generation.

Warren Moon calls Evangelicals “Johnny-come-latties” to the discussion of the soul and its care citing 1995 as the first time the term “soul care” surfaced at an evangelical conference. He points out, however, that the care and cure of souls within the evangelical tradition has garnered meaningful and fruitful attention in recent years. Moon suggests that evangelicals would do well to invest energy in formalizing definitions concerning terms specific to the soul care discussion, indicating that ambiguity in the field limits synergistic efforts. Toward that end, he offers his understanding of the soul as being like “a program that runs a computer; you don’t usually notice it unless it messes up.”³ He quotes Dallas Willard defining the soul as being the “life center of the human being.”⁴ These perspectives understand the soul as a place of integration and connection for different parts of a person.

Rick Langer identifies several ways that the soul care movement is offering

¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 11.

² James M. Houston, “Seeking Historical Perspectives for Spiritual Direction and Soul Care Today,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 96.

³ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002).

⁴ John Ortberg, *Soul Keeping: Caring for the Most Important Part of You* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 42. John is quoting from a conversation with Dallas Willard.

“thicker” perspectives on salvation to the church. He is critical of a “cognitivist anthropology, (that) adopts a stunted pedagogy that is fixated on the mind” and results in what he refers to as, “bobble head Christians”, whose minds are developed at the expense of their other faculties.⁵ Langer sees current soul care trends that define spiritual maturity in broader categories as more consistent with the Scripture. In particular, he appreciates a renewed discussion that “links body and soul as partners, not aliens or enemies.”⁶ Betsy Barber and Chris Baker, see the soul care discussion happening best in conjunction with a fuller kingdom awareness. For them, the “nourishment, healing, and flourishing of the whole person” is fulfilled when “soul care becomes participation in the reign of the King.” Spiritually mature souls are those who, “go out in the King’s name as his beloved, deputized, Spirit-filled children and do the will of the King.”⁷ Richard Averbeck agrees that soul formation is not just an inward experience. He says, “Private devotion is important, but it is not just an end in itself. God sent Christ to love people and he sends Christians to do the same.”⁸ These are some of the thickening contributions extending from current soul care discussions.

Baker and Barber also make insightful comments concerning the soul care of mature believers which relate directly to the topic of missionary soul care addressed in this thesis-project. They observe that the soul care of mature believers is often neglected and that these believers need a different kind of care than their younger counterparts.

⁵ James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 42-43.

⁶ Rick Langer, “*Points of Unease with the Spiritual Formation Movement*”, *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* (2012): 185.

⁷ Betsy Barber and Chris Baker, “*Soul Care and Spiritual Formation: An Old Call in Need of New Voices*”, *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 7, no. 2 (2014): 274.

⁸ Richard E. Averbeck, “*Spirit, Community and Mission: A Biblical Theology for Spiritual Formation*”, *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (2008): 44.

Citing Todd Hall's 1997 research into the spiritual health of pastors, they observe that that many pastors' inner lives are struggling more than their outer ministry might suggest. Hall highlights the fact that "the very thing that is emphasized the least in seminary (interpersonal maturity) can be tied to almost every problem the research indicates is prevalent among pastors."⁹ Loneliness and isolation can be crippling issues for mature Christians. Henri Nouwen suggests that Christian leaders need a place to share their burdens with "people who do not need them, but who can guide them ever deeper into the mystery of God's love."¹⁰ Baker and Barber see authentic community as the missing component for many maturing souls, encouraging the company of "soul friends who are trustworthy people of peace with their edges worn off by life's lessons."¹¹ This observation serves as a valuable segue for a discussion of the ongoing value of vulnerability and engagement in the spiritual life.

Soul Health as Vulnerability and Engagement

Brené Brown is a sociologist at the University of Houston. She identifies as a Christian but does not write from an overtly Biblical frame of reference, preferring instead to base her observations and conclusions on 12 years of experience as a shame and vulnerability researcher. That said, her findings frequently align with scriptural truth and provide a useful statistical spring board to launch a discussion about the soul.

⁹ Todd W. Hall, "*The Personal Functioning of Pastors: A Review of Empirical Research with Implications (Hall 1997) for the Care of Pastors*," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 25, no. 2 (June 1997): 252.

¹⁰ Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 2001), 50.

¹¹ Betsy Barber and Chris Baker, "*Soul Care and Spiritual Formation: An Old Call in Need of New Voices*," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 7, no. 2 (2014): 278.

Brown describes her research as “story catching” saying that “stories are data with a soul.”¹² Brown uses Grounded Research Methodology to evaluate the stories of participants. This style of research allows conclusions to emerge from the comprehensive coding of interview manuscripts. Brown’s conclusions are based on interviews with 1280 study participants and are bolstered by the evaluation and coding of the field notes of 400 graduate students in her social work courses. In addition, she coded 11,000 incidents from secondary sources in search of common shame and vulnerability themes. This style of research attempts to engage the data objectively allowing themes to present organically. Brown says, “the primary focus of the analysis was identifying the participants’ main concerns and the emergence of a core variable.” As her interviews progressed, she attempted to “reconceptualize categories,” letting the data guide both the questions and the conclusions of the research. The coding involved line-by-line evaluation of interview manuscripts with several questions in mind:¹³

- What are the participants describing?
- What do they care about?
- What are they worried about?
- What are the participants trying to do?
- What explains the different behaviors, thoughts, and actions?

Brown’s methodical research revealed two basic categories of participants. She identified participants who “feel a deep sense of love and belonging, and those who struggle for it.” The singular statistical difference in these groups centered on the

¹² Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly* (New York, NY: Gotham Books, 2012), 252.

¹³ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 258.

participant's view of his or her own worthiness. "Those who feel lovable, who love, and who experience belonging simply believe they are worthy of love and belonging."¹⁴ She describes these individuals as "wholehearted" and contends that they exhibit patterns of deeper engagement with life, more creative initiative, and greater willingness to be vulnerable.¹⁵ These people have a greater resolve in reference to their sense of worthiness, so there is not as much on the line for them as they engage others. Surprisingly, there is no statistical connection between "wholehearted" living and pleasant, secure life circumstances. Wholehearted individuals "don't have better or easier lives, they don't have fewer struggles with addiction or depression, and they haven't survived fewer traumas, bankruptcies or divorces."¹⁶ Much of Brown's book, *Daring Greatly* is a treatise on building shame resilience by enhancing personal worth. While some of her strategies are flavored by humanism, most offer helpful encouragement to soul care in a missionary context.

Brown's research confirms, "Connection...is what gives purpose and meaning to (life)"¹⁷ and that "love and belonging are irreducible needs of all men, women, and children."¹⁸ Further, she observes humanity is "psychologically, emotionally, cognitively and spiritually hardwired for connection, love and belonging."¹⁹ Her research also exposes a problem. Most people struggle, at some level, with a sense of shame that causes them to feel "unworthy of love, belonging or connection."²⁰ Her hundreds of hours of interviews confirm both the design of humanity and its defect. In Gen 2 people

¹⁴ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 11.

¹⁵ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 11.

¹⁶ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 15.

¹⁷ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 68.

¹⁸ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 10.

¹⁹ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 79.

²⁰ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 68.

are created out of the overflow of the perfect love of the Trinity. Adam and Eve are designed as an expression of Trinitarian mutuality in the deepest part of their being. Like the Trinity, Adam and Eve's sense of worth was secure at creation, freeing them to love. Sin alters the perfection of the garden in Gen 3, and the first couple is reduced to hiding and blaming as core relational strategies. An unsettled sense of self causes their love to become inwardly focused. Brown does not reference Scripture, but her observations about the basic needs of every soul and the obstacle that interferes with having that need met, align with the Biblical narrative. For Brown and in Scripture, a healthy soul is one that is known, connected, and not controlled by shame.

Brown contends that shame awareness begins with a person's first glimpse of inadequacy. She defines shame as, "the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging."²¹ When a child fails to meet an expectation (whether internally or externally imposed), they enter a war zone of worthiness. Each person creates an internal narrative to cope with the perceived failure. Natural man creates emotional distance from shame by writing every internal narrative through lenses of victimization, judgment, competition, or fear. Brown says that people create a suit of armor to provide safety and limit vulnerability, but wearing the armor prohibits the very connection that is desired. Many find security in performance-based body armor, but Brown warns of the seductive attraction of being "perfect or bulletproof."²² She contends, "If you trade in your authenticity for safety, you may experience the following: anxiety, depression, eating disorders, addiction, rage,

²¹ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 69.

²² Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 2.

blame, resentment and inexplicable grief.”²³ A lifestyle centered around the desire to perform, please, and prove may promise a level of security that appears desirable, but sustaining such a rubric for worth requires constant competition or carefully scripted pretense, both of which inhibit vulnerability and block meaningful connection. Brown’s observations have important applications to religious contexts.

Religious Shame Culture

Most missionary organizations have a doctrinal statement that influences the “why, how and who” of their strategic plan. This statement is a collection of biblical convictions that the members of the organization agree upon and consider essential to the Christian foundation of the mission. It also influences the internal ethos and external perception of many organizations. Doctrinal clarity, while essential, can carry with it subtly implied expectations expressed as organizational “shoulds.” Most religious cultures are filled with “shoulds.” They are stated and unstated maxims extending from the mission’s core values. In Jesus’ day there were over 600 additions to the Law designed to “help” the faithful Jew live correctly. No doubt, most mission agencies have similar holiness management guidelines influencing their organizational cultures.

The “shoulds” of an evangelical missionary culture can create a religious expression of the bulletproof armor about which Brown warns. It is expressed in projected holiness: a life aligned with organizational “shoulds” and designed to impress observers. Most “should” values have some foundation in Biblical truth, which make them difficult to recognize. Complicating the situation further, they do not allow room for

²³ Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You’re Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (City Center, MN: Hazelden, 2010), 59.

grace, input, process, or failure but tend to encourage pride when expectations are attained and shame when they are not. *Should Culture* creates barriers between people. In short, it fosters an endless competition-isolation feedback loop that can steal the life of an organization by alienating its membership from one another. Brown contends, “Shame can only rise so far in any system before people disengage to protect themselves.”²⁴ Vulnerability and connectedness are the causalities of a culture controlled by shame. The “should” minefield is a reality for many people involved in missions. Behavioral pressures are internal, organizational and often expressed by churches and individual supporters. A healthy soul navigates this landscape with a sense of worthiness rooted in Christ’s love; worthiness that is strengthened by purposed self-awareness and empowered by offering vulnerability in key relationships. Toward this end, Brown offers several helpful worth-increasing strategies.

Confronting Shame

One of the surprising conclusions of her research involves a distinction between *belonging* and *fitting in*. Brown defines belonging as an “innate desire to be a part of something larger than us.”²⁵ Belonging, however, cannot happen at the expense of authenticity, but occurs when “we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world.”²⁶ If a soul/self is required to change in order to find acceptance, then it is only “fitting in.” Belonging affirms soul worthiness while “fitting in” impedes any true sense of acceptance. This is an important distinction for mission organizations to understand.

²⁴ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 192.

²⁵ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 231.

²⁶ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 145.

Organizational expectations can pressure a missionary soul to “fit in” and result in a group of people who all look the same and speak with similar vocabulary but experience no real sense of being valued or loved. This is especially significant in addressing issues of failure or under performance. Organizations must have a clearly articulated theology of process and growth that allows for (and even expects) failure. These are moments when “belonging” is either verified or undermined. Belonging (being loved) is the foundation for any organizational culture that aspires to authenticity, connection, and creativity.

An environment of belonging encourages honest self-awareness. Toward this end, Brown cites two helpful categories for honest reflection. She says that people have both “aspirational values” (“elusive values that reside in our best intentions”) and “practiced values” (“how we actually live, feel and think”). The healthy self takes time to recognize the difference between the two and embraces the process of practiced values growing in the direction of aspirations. A healthy soul must face the ongoing, regular (and normal) question, “Am I walking my talk.”²⁷ Mission agencies would do well to find opportunities to encourage field leadership to use both these categories when creating growth plans for people under their care. They encourage honesty, process, and growth.

Brown encourages developing a list of five trusted people “whose opinions matter.”²⁸ In this, she provides a helpful tool that keeps a soul open to honest input while protecting it from uninformed, unengaged scrutiny and criticism. The public forum in which most missionaries live requires this kind of balancing act. A healthy missionary soul must be both open and protected.

²⁷ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 175.

²⁸ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 171.

Brown sees vulnerability as, “the core, the heart, the center of meaningful human experiences.”²⁹ Her research clearly exposes the central longing of all people to be connected. Vulnerability is the path where relationship happens. A soul that “belongs” must be strengthened by the regular practice of vulnerability in trusted relationships. This is the antidote to “bulletproof perfectionism,” allowing love to be given and received when production may or may not be acceptable.

Brown encourages her readers to “show up and let (themselves) be seen.” She notes, “shame derives its power from being unspeakable. Language and story bring light to shame and destroy it.”³⁰ Her message parallels much of the light and darkness imagery in Scripture. Exposure creates an opportunity to experience grace, to address personal flaws without allowing correction to be a shaming event. Creating this type of environment is a partnership between missionary and sending agency. It requires courage and honesty from both. Brown’s significant contribution to the understanding of soul health invites this kind of partnership through mutual engagement, awareness, and vulnerability.

The Relational Formation of the Self

According to Martin Buber, there are two fundamental relational principles that govern existence. They are represented by modes of relating that he calls “I-You” and “I-It.” “I-It” relationships are essential to living in the world. The “I-It” realm is one of measuring, analyzing, judging and using. In their correct setting these agencies are absolutely essential to any kind of measurable progress personally or institutionally. “I-

²⁹ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 11.

³⁰ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 67.

It” terminology necessarily fills the pages of business plans, growth charts, and vision statements, describing measurable outcomes and needed resources. Progress necessitates aligning resources (both material and human) to predetermined goals. “I-It” relationships are transactional. In them the “I” stays distinct from its subject and might be best described as an *ego that uses* rather than a *self that relates*.³¹

To Buber, the self or the soul is the realm of “I-You.” “I-You” relating is always about being present in a moment. These moments are not scripted or planned but always involve the full attention of both the “I” and the “You.” Buber delineates between the *experience* of “I-It” relating (which can be cataloged, recounted, and used) and the *encounter* of “I-You” relating (which transforms). Buber writes, “It is solely by virtue of his power to relate (I-You) that man is able to live in the spirit.” He contends that there is never an authentic “I” without a “You.” Buber’s insights highlight the relational priority in the formation of the self. For Buber, “Man becomes an I through a You.”³² In essence a person’s “I” is a gift bestowed by the “You” of another. He concludes his argument by addressing the importance of relating to the “eternal You.” For Buber, “Every single *You* is a glimpse of that.”³³ It is easy to overlay Buber’s philosophical conclusions with the Genesis creation account. In Gen 2 the *You* of God breathes life into the *I* of Adam, and he becomes a living soul/self.

For Christians, it is the partnership between Buber’s two modes of relating that creates the most fertile ground for the growth of a healthy, connected soul. It is the context of our service (the transactions of “I-It” relating) where love is experienced. Our

³¹ Buber, Martin. *I and Thou; a New Translation by Walter Kaufmann* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 112.

³² Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 80.

³³ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 123.

most intimate “I-You” encounters find real life expressions through the context of “I-It” transactions of service, encouragement, and blessing. When a husband puts his own desires aside and sacrificially serves his wife (an “I-It” transaction), she experiences an expression of their “I-You” relationship. Buber might bristle at the blending of experience and encounter, preferring to embrace the purity and existential surprise of “I-You” moments, but normal life choices always provide the context for authentic love to be seen. Perhaps he would be more comfortable with the husband, mentioned above, having a pure “I-You” moment with God (the eternal “You”) that finds “I-It” expression with his wife. In either case, the importance of “I-You” transformational encounters must be seen in others-oriented, “I-It” transactions. In many ways this parallels the cooperative relationship of faith and works in the NT. Equally important to understanding the interdependence of these two modes of relating is the understanding of their distinction.

Soul problems arise when transactions (I-It) become the primary conduit of living for a person. Recalling Brené Brown’s research, man is designed to relate, and relating is, primarily, a function of being not doing. Buber contends that “I-You” moments, where souls encounter one another, are what sustain the core values of humanity.³⁴ He describes them as the “cradle of life.”³⁵ It is significant to notice when these defining moments of encounter arise since they provide the sustaining pulse and purpose for more common I-It experiences. This is particularly important in “doing cultures” where value is often based on production. Chapter 1 defined evangelical missions’ culture through a “knowing-going-doing” lens. Passionate, activist cultures need to listen well to Buber, recognizing that transformation is a function of being set in the context of doing. Because the “doing”

³⁴ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 84.

³⁵ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 60.

transactions (I-It) are more easily measured and managed, they often become a priority. Buber passionately warns such cultures, “O mysteriousness without mystery, O piling up of information! It, it, it!”³⁶ A healthy soul has an awareness of moments where knowing and being known take priority over any sense of measurable accomplishment. In the doing culture of evangelical missions, Buber offers the prophetic warning to set aside time to “be” and to create opportunities for “I-You” connection that revolve around relational fullness not ministry functionality.

Brain Chemistry and the Soul

Dr. Curt Thompson has several credentials that make his contribution to a discussion on soul care interesting and unique. Thompson is a psychiatrist, credentialed by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. He is also a practicing therapist and a committed Christian. His book, *Anatomy of the Soul*, combines interesting neuro-research, informative counseling case studies, and solid Biblical anthropology. His writing is provocative, practical, and accessible. His bent toward an Attachment counseling model makes healthy relational connection a unifying theme of this excellent book.

Thompson speaks with scientific confidence confronting the myth of individualism. “The neuroscience is clear: the concept of a single functioning neuron or a single functioning brain simply does not exist in nature.” Thompson describes the mind as “an embodied and relational process from within and between brains, that regulates the

³⁶ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 55.

flow of energy and information.”³⁷ The mind is constantly scanning a person’s internal and external world, seeking meaningful connection while protecting against alienation and isolation. Thompson mixes neuro-research with the biblical narrative saying, “It is not good for a man or a woman - or a neuron or a brain - to be alone.”³⁸ Brown confirms the human need for authentic relationships sociologically. Buber adds his philosophical perspective on soul formation as a function of being. Thompson’s relational conclusions are based on brain chemistry and counseling experience. All three agree that soul care must be discussed with plural pronouns. This pushes against western individualism.

Soul care happens best when it is a community experience. There are situations where a soul must survive independently, but generally, it is not a good context for a healthy self. Jean Baker Miller and Irene Stiver, are relational-cultural theorists at Wellesley College. They describe psychological isolation as “the most terrifying and destructive feeling that a person can experience.”³⁹ Perhaps the antithesis is true as well, that loving community is the most inviting and empowering environment a soul will ever experience. Most of the Bible is written to a community. Most of the “you” references in Scripture are plural in nature. Moses, Isaiah, John, Peter, Paul, and so many more, invite corporate formation, corporate brokenness, corporate celebration, and corporate repentance. Thompson describes the mind as “interdependent” and “contingent,” meaning that it is best understood in a context of mutuality and community, adjusting attitudes and choices constantly based on an evaluation of variables that it determines to

³⁷ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2010), 29.

³⁸ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 112.

³⁹ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 139.

be favorable or unfavorable for connection. He concludes that, “there is no such thing as a true individual.”⁴⁰

A second contribution made by Thomson concerns the nature and function of the left and right hemispheres of the brain. He describes the left hemisphere as the place where we “know” things. More specifically, “It separates us from the objects we wish to examine and analyze, which is critical if we are to interpret what we are experiencing.” This seems similar to what Buber is describing with “I-It” relationships. The right brain facilitates more relational operations. It is the sphere of creativity and connection. Thompson warns of engaging left brain analytical functions in right brain relational contexts saying, “When (left brain) analysis is the dominant mode by which we encounter other people or God ... joy becomes merely a defined concept. Love is something we know about but do not know.” Thompson continues, “the right mode of operations enables us to open ourselves to be touched by God and known by him in such a way as to become living expressions of love.”⁴¹ The openness Thompson encourages is what Brené Brown calls vulnerability.

Certainly, Thompson champions the idea of soul health as a function of the integration of left and right hemispheres, but he recognizes the temptation to live with an unhealthy reliance on left brain functions. This is particularly problematic in the arena of the soul. Most people have had the experience of enduring a well-articulated sermon that accurately unpacks a Bible passage revealing technical mastery of language, history, and hermeneutics but lacks life and passion. The skill of Bible exposition can be learned and mimicked. This is a function of the analytical left brain (and is an important skill in

⁴⁰ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 99.

⁴¹ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 37.

understanding an ancient book). The living Word pulsates in the realm of the right brain, experiencing connection and gaining confidence by experiencing love. The left brain informs, but the right brain transforms. A quick review of the “heart-centric” focus of Scripture from chapter two will confirm that the words which Biblical authors use to talk about the heart are expressions of right lobe function. Spiritual formation models must move beyond information based seminars and manuals and into more right-brain-friendly experiences. Art, music, story, and other creative expressions have the potential to bridge and integrate whole brain function in the spiritual formation process.

Interestingly, Thomson contends that, “from a neuroscience perspective, sin is deeply reflected in the degree to which our minds are dis-integrated or in Paul’s language depraved.”⁴² Dis-integration is certainly prevalent in the immoral, licentious behaviors Paul confronts in many of his epistles. However, it is also the root of the tongue lashing that Jesus gives the Pharisees in Matt 23. Dis-integration has both immoral and religious expressions. In both cases repentance invites integration. According to Thompson, “telling the truth - both verbally and nonverbally - about our mistakes actually enhances the integration of the mind.”⁴³

Lastly, and most profoundly, Thomson blends his expertise in neuro science with his experience as a therapist, unpacking the power of empathy in dealing with traumatic experiences. He begins by quoting Hebb’s Axiom: “Neurons that fire together wire together.”⁴⁴ Experiences cause certain neural networks to fire in sequence. These sequences have, what amounts to, a memory. When a similar situation is confronted, the

⁴² Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 184.

⁴³ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 121.

⁴⁴ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 65.

same network of neurons tends to fire. Thompson explains, “Your brain (especially your right hemisphere) is wired in such a way that whenever it captures (the) same set of stimuli from nonverbal signals, it reacts with a similar, virtually automatic neural network of firing pattern that leads to the behavior of avoidance.”⁴⁵ The neurological firing pattern of a traumatic experience can be triggered repeatedly by situations that are similar to the precipitating event, resulting in recurring stress and anxiety. Thomson points out that most traumatic stories are told from a left-brain-perspective. It is not surprising that the brain engages these stories from an analytical and emotional distance. Because the mind anticipates the future based on the experiences of the past, a left-brain-engaged story teller predetermines expected reactions of shame and judgment based on past experience. Thomson points out, the storyteller’s right brain can be surprised by a listener’s unexpected empathetic response, triggering a new neurological firing pattern and a different emotional experience.

“Simply put, your right brain, with its nonverbal awareness, can be surprised by an encounter with another person’s right brain. If, when you feel sad, you see a look of compassion rather than impatience or disgust, your right brain will register that response as something novel and likely respond with a different output of its own. Such a dramatic shift in your right-brain processing is necessary for such an association to change, and it is possible only when your right brain encounters another right brain.”⁴⁶

This transformational experience is the result of, what Thompson succinctly describes as, “feeling felt.”⁴⁷

Thomson’s observations about story and connected neural networks are significant for anyone involved in soul care. A soul/self can experience greater freedom

⁴⁵ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 97.

⁴⁶ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 78.

⁴⁷ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 98.

through the attentive presence of an empathetic listener. Thompson points out that the facts of the traumatic story will not have changed, but the memory of it will. “You will also change your future because now that you have experienced a different reaction to your sadness, you can anticipate a different response.”⁴⁸ Thompson concludes that “faithfully telling and listening to our stories is one of the single most important things we can do as followers of Jesus.”⁴⁹

Trinity: The Theological Launchpad of Soul Care

The relational nature of the soul is endorsed by the observations and conclusions of the three authors engaged above. Michael Reeves, a British theologian, contributes to the discussion of soul care by articulating the importance of a Trinitarian doctrinal foundation to a Biblical understanding of:

- The essential nature of God
- The soul as a reflection of the relational image of the Godhead
- Loss of relationship as defining the primary tragedy of the Fall
- The relational glory of the Imago Dei restored

For Reeves, Trinity is not just another attribute of God, but it is *the* central organizing theological idea around which all other attributes revolve and are best understood. In his book, *Delighting in the Trinity*, Reeves contends, “Trinity is the governing center of all Christian belief, the truth that shapes and beautifies all others.”⁵⁰ As was described in chapter two (ideas significantly influenced by Reeves), the Father,

⁴⁸ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 78.

⁴⁹ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 81.

⁵⁰ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 16.

Son, and Spirit have eternally existed in perfect loving mutuality. Outwardly focused love for the other members of the Godhead is the central defining characteristic of both God's nature and activity. "God is love" (1 John 4:8) is simply another way of saying God is Trinity, since loving union is his essence. Reeves believes that every other attribute of God is most accurately understood through the lens of Trinity, seeing it as the "secret of His beauty"⁵¹ and "the vital oxygen of Christian life and joy."⁵²

Reeves views the creation of the world, and specifically of Adam and Eve, as an overflow of the love shared between the Father, Son, and Spirit. "Being triune, God is a sharing God, a God that loves to include. His love is not for keeping but for spreading."⁵³ For Reeves the plurality and unity of God are extremely important to defining his essence. Unity ensures integrated purpose and plurality outward moving, selfless love. If God is a singularity, then he is "fundamentally inward looking and not outgoingly loving. Essentially, he is all about private self-gratification."⁵⁴ A religion whose deity is solitary cannot legitimately claim to be eternally loving. To Reeves, solitary gods create out of some sense of need (companionship or assistance) or possibly from a desire to control. Not so the Trinity. "The creation was a free choice born out of nothing but love."⁵⁵ Outward moving Trinitarian love is the motivation for the physical creation. To Reeves, it is also the central reflection of the Imago Dei.

Like the Trinity, the first man and woman were created to live in loving mutuality. It was not good for man to be alone because he was made with the relational

⁵¹ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 61.

⁵² Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 18.

⁵³ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 30.

⁵⁴ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 40.

⁵⁵ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 49.

nature of the Trinity. So, Adam and “Eve (were) created to look outward, to look like God and to enjoy God as the source of all goodness and life.”⁵⁶ The loving image of the Trinity was stamped onto the soul of the first couple, as was outwardly-moving, loving activity that reflected their Creator. Reeves continues, “From eternity, the Father so loves the Son that he excites the Son’s eternal love in response; Christ so loves the church that he excites our love in response; the husband so loves his wife that he excites her to love him back. Such is the spreading goodness that rolls out of the very being of this God.”⁵⁷ The intimate relational design breathed into Adam and Eve reflected God’s deepest essence, and it is the thing that was most impacted at the Fall.

Reeves is consistent in keeping relationship at the heart of God’s agenda as he considers the impact of the Fall. Adam and Eve were created to love. Their essential nature was not, so much changed when they believed the lie of Satan, as it was reoriented. They continued to operate according to their essential nature as beings that loved, “but Eve (as well as Adam) was turning inward to love only herself. And thus she was turning from the image of God into the image of the devil.”⁵⁸ Self love was a defensive reaction to the vulnerability Adam and Eve felt at the Fall. Is it any wonder that Gen 3:10–13 finds Adam and Eve’s new self-love expressed in hiding, and blaming? Self love quickly degenerates, leaving Adam in what Baxter Kruger calls “the tragic nightmare of his self-referential confusion.”⁵⁹ Kruger expands on the implications of this confused state, saying that the disaster of the Fall is most profoundly seen in the blindness of Adam and Eve. “Their perception of reality became skewed, so skewed that

⁵⁶ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 68.

⁵⁷ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 29.

⁵⁸ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 68.

⁵⁹ Baxter Kruger, *The Shack Revisited*, (New York, NY: Faith Words: 2012), 143.

they could no longer perceive the real truth about God or about themselves.”⁶⁰ Self-referential, self-protective, wrong thinking about the nature of God is the dark shadow behind most expressions of sin in the pages of the Bible and in the lives of believers today. In fact, in the 17th century, John Owen contended that doubting God’s love strikes at his emotional core like few other doubts saying, “You can no way more trouble or burden him.”⁶¹

Ever consistent in his relational focus, Reeves understands justification and sanctification as re-engagement with the Trinity. He refers to the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) in describing the nature of the “coming-to-life of the new man” as “wholehearted joy in God through Christ and a delight to do every kind of good God wants us to.”⁶² The works of the new life reflect the overflow of Trinitarian love into which the believer has been enfolded. Reeves says, “the Spirit’s work in giving us new life, then is nothing less than bringing us to share in their (the Trinity’s) mutual delight.”⁶³ Trinitarian continuity is important to Reeves in explaining justification and sanctification:

My new life began when the Spirit first opened my eyes and won my heart to Christ. Then, for the first time, I began to enjoy and love Christ as the Father has always done. And through Christ, for the first time, I began to enjoy the love of the Father as the Son has always done...by revealing the beauty, love, glory and kindness of Christ to me, the Spirit kindles in me an ever deepening and more sincere love for God. And as he stirs me to think ever more on Christ, he makes me more and more God like: less self obsessed and more Christ obsessed.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Baxter Kruger, *The Shack Revisited*, 139.

⁶¹ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 97.

⁶² Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 100.

⁶³ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 87.

⁶⁴ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 93.

Reeves describes the whole process as “untwisting me;”⁶⁵ the “expulsive power of a new affection”⁶⁶ inviting fellowship with the Trinity and reversing the inwardly bent, self-protective love of Gen 3.

Reeves uncompromising Trinitarian passion breathes needed life into the “knowing, going, doing” Evangelical missions culture. As cited in chapter 1, the best and worst of evangelical missions’ history can be evaluated through categories that revolve around a commitment to handle the word correctly and sacrificially serve for the sake of Christ. The kingdom of God has been purified (Reformation) and expanded in significant ways through agencies aligned with these values. But many of these same organizations have a trail of burned-out, numb-souled workers who have failed to tend their “being” while engaged in purposeful kingdom work. Reeves relational-theological foundation brings important balance to doing cultures regarding soul health. The starting place of all meaningful and sustainable doing must involve “being.”

John’s first epistle begins with a being invitation. “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). Amazingly, John seems to be inviting his readers to join him as he enjoys the fellowship of the Trinity. In Christ, John enjoys the full outward-moving, selfless love of the Father, Son, and Spirit. The priority of relationship to service is worth noticing. Certainly, activity is an important fruit of every new life in Christ, but the soul is designed to bear the fruit of doing from a secure foundation of being (loved, included, and called). John Owen challenged believers in his day to gaze on the Lord’s beauty, knowing that it would bear

⁶⁵ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 93.

⁶⁶ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 100.

the fruit of action. “Put, then, this to the venture: exercise your thoughts upon this very thing, the eternal, free, and fruitful love of the Father, and see if your hearts be not wrought upon to delight in him.”⁶⁷ Delight in the Lord will always lead to active partnership in what matters to him.

Simply put, the soul, in the image of the Trinity, is designed for delighting. God breathed an outwardly focused love into the first man and woman that was a perfect reflection of what the Father, Son, and Spirit had enjoyed in eternity past. Timothy Keller says it this way:

Ultimate reality is a community of persons who know and love one another. That is what the universe, God, history, and life is all about. If you favor money, power, and accomplishment over human relationships, you will dash yourself on the rocks of reality. When Jesus said you must lose yourself in service to find yourself (Mark 8:35), he was recounting what the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have been doing throughout eternity.⁶⁸

Reeves’ passionate commitment to Trinity as the source of rightly understanding the “self” is an important reminder to doing cultures. Souls must be tended lest they “dash themselves on the rocks” of the (relational) reality of the Trinity.

Round Table

Any discussion of the soul/self involves distinct challenges because the topic is difficult to measure. Engaging these four authors brackets the discussion of the soul with multidisciplinary diligence. Perhaps the soul/self, more than most topics, deserves this kind of eclectic attention. These authors bring different professional expertise and “measure” the soul accordingly. It is significant that they all concur in regard to the

⁶⁷ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 97.

⁶⁸ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2008), 214.

nature of the soul and in regard to that which is essential to its ongoing health. It is easy to imagine these four having a stimulating and mutually satisfying discussion regarding the soul.

Brown begins this fictitious discussion by citing her research as an honest attempt to understand why some people handle the challenges of life better than others. She details her appropriate professional objectivity and researcher “best practices,” highlighting her attempt to let the data speak for itself. Through thorough and meticulous interviews and data coding, she concludes that every soul longs to be connected with other souls. Buber interrupts her with enthusiastic agreement. He adds that even more than needing connection, one soul is, in his opinion, actually formed by another soul. “Every *I* only forms as a result of an encounter with an authentic *You*, ” he intones through a guttural German accent. He proceeds to craft a fifteen-minute diatribe about the need to prioritize “*I-You*” moments that will define, grow, and actually fuel self. Failing to do so allows life to fall into the category of “*I-It*” experiences. When these transactional ways of living become the focal point of existence, the nature of the soul suffers.

At this point Buber realizes that he has been passionately dominating the conversation and, in fact, treating the others transactionally. He sincerely apologizes and is forgiven by the group, enjoying an “*I-You*” moment of both self-disclosure and personal clarity. Brown helps the group notice the value of vulnerability to building connection and points out that if this group is ever going to go anywhere, they will all have to choose to model the same behavior.

Capitalizing on a short pause, Thompson, distributes a schematic of the brain to the others. He explains Hebb's Axiom and wonders if Buber might have had experiences in the past when his passionately talkative disposition was not well received? Buber's eyes find the table in front of him, and his shoulders slump, to which Brown whispers, loud enough for everyone to hear, "Shame! I'd know that body language anywhere." Thomson continues to explain that Buber's neurological firing patterns are pre conditioned to anticipate critical responses from this group of professionals based on his past experiences but that they, as a group, are ready to respond with understanding and empathy toward their colleague. Buber re-engages eye contact, stepping away from the shaming moment. Brown congratulates him on his "shame resilience," and Thompson tells him his right brain has just created a new, healthier neural firing pattern.

Reeves, the picture of British reserved deference to this point, asks if he might have a go at the moment with Buber. He explains that people are designed, imprinted, if you will, to be in relationship. He is careful to quote Genesis to appeal to Buber's Jewish roots and not complicate the discussion by bringing Jesus up. He points out that for a soul to be healthy, it must be outward moving and selfless like the Trinity. Buber does not totally agree with the Trinity reference but, in a spirit of openness and because he has already had his say in the conversation, elects to remain quiet. Reeves continues that all people have a twisted love as a result of sin. Their natural outward moving bent has been turned toward self-serving ends. Brown chimes in, "Because of shame." Reeves and Thompson agree, and Buber nods, mostly agreeing.

Here is where the conversation gets bit tense. Brown begins describing shame resilience strategies based on an individual's innate sense of worthiness. "Borrowed

worthiness, based on being in Christ,” corrects Reeves. Thompson agrees, but while Buber acknowledges the value of an eternal *You* in defining the *I* of every person, he is not keen on narrowing the deity options to only Christian. Brown cautiously attempts to find middle ground between the two camps while guiding the discussion toward pragmatic outcome-based strategies to reduce shame and increase worth. Reeves cannot let it go. He appreciates the pragmatism of Brown’s ideas but is hesitant to move too quickly to a doing discussion. The round table ends with general respect shared by all participants. They agree on the relational priorities of the soul and find significant unity in defining shame as the problem that needs to be overcome for healthy souls to thrive. The further the group gets into pragmatic outcomes, the more they tend to disagree.

The complexity of the soul ensures ongoing, interesting discussion about its nature and development. There is great value to listening objectively to the ideas and conclusions of thoughtful contributors from varied fields of study. The synthesis of such study validates the Biblical narrative, supporting the relational core of the soul as well as the need for meaningful attachment for a soul/self to grow.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BEING PROJECT

Design and Influences

This project was designed to invite the participant to an awareness and an enjoyment of God's presence. John 17 seems to indicate that believers are invited to the level of fellowship with God that Jesus enjoyed. Eugene Peterson points out a fundamental tension in the nature of this relationship in that it is not a "conversation among equals, but at least both parties are speaking the same language, a language of revelation, a deeply relational language, not an informational language, not a manipulative language."¹ The Being Project was an invitation to relationship grounded in the ideas communicated in the previous chapters.

- Buber's "I-You" encounter frames the hope of connection with God and connection between participant and "listener."
- The conviction that every believer is invited into fellowship with the Trinity is at the heart of the project.
- It is intentionally right brain focused, attempting to engage the redeemed imagination as a vehicle for Biblically informed transformation.
- It is centrally about transforming the heart, believing that a heart caught by the love of Jesus always bears fruit in actions aligned with his priorities.
- It is designed to be experienced with a partner since the soul is not designed for solitary journeys.

¹ Eugene Peterson, *Tell It Slant: A Conversation on the Language of Jesus in his Stories and Prayers*, (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 266.

- It is written for a missions culture that excels in knowing, going, and doing but often neglects being.
- It invites vulnerability and exposure, attempting to normalize brokenness and encourage grace-filled, patient “bearing with one another in love” (Eph 4:2).

Simply stated, the goal of the “Being Project” is to cultivate an attentive responsiveness to God. Attentive responsiveness is a faith posture that believes God is at work and that “gazing on his beauty” (Ps 27) will stimulate obedience and partnership with his agenda. Because it is such a central value of this project, it is important to be clear in understanding this idea.

“Attentiveness” might be described as faith-filled expectant awareness. The mind that is responsively attentive is ever observing its inner and outer world, anxious to catch a glimpse of God in surprising and wonderful places. This kind of awareness fuels the anticipation of God’s presence, heightening the soul’s expectation and sensitivity.

“Responsiveness” should not be understood as passivity. Attentive responsiveness is engaged and active, but activity is initiated by God and responded to by the believer. It does not presume to control outcomes, humbly recognizing that human perspective is often limited and undependable in directional matters. This way of thinking establishes the Holy Spirit as the leader in the process of change. It provides significant freedom for the believer since the process of transformation never includes working harder as a catalytic requirement for transformation. It does not, however, preclude focused, intentional effort, but such activity is always the extension of a heart captured by the love of the Father. In a “doing culture,” activity and productivity can easily become a currency

used to secure God's favor. Making actions secondary, the responsive fruit of being loved, protects against validation based on production.

Curt Thompson provides a helpful example of attentive responsiveness from the life of Christ. At Jesus' baptism, recorded in Luke 3, the Father speaks his pleasure over the Son. Most people are conditioned to credit the Father's pleasure to a positive assessment of the Son's obedience. Thompson asks a game changing provocative question, "What if from his earliest days on the planet, Jesus was deeply aware that God's fundamental orientation toward his entire creation, humans especially, was one of deep, compassionate affection?"² He continues,

What if Jesus' life was first and foremost a response to his acute awareness of Yahweh's affection, to the depth of being known and loved by his Father. In this sense, the progression is reversed: Jesus's behavior (affirmed at his baptism) follows God's pleasure. First, before anything, God is pleased—He's just that kind of God to begin with—and then Jesus responded with behavior that was reflective of one who is supremely confident that he is infinitely loved by God. In this sense, as he grew, Jesus increased in his awareness of God's pleasure. He did not simply grow in what he knew about God, but in his felt awareness of God's pleasure with him, God's joy in Jesus' presence. Jesus' life was a living breathing, fearless response to his experience of a God who contingently pays attention to his creation and takes great joy in its presence.³

Doing cultures often unwittingly send the message, "behave/perform well and you will be loved." The gospel challenges this way of thinking saying that we love because we have been loved. It is a subtle but important distinction. This project aims to encourage "attentive responsiveness," believing that renewed

² Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2010), 142.

³ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 144.

awareness of the love of God is the most dependable and Biblical catalyst for responsive holy living.

Unpacking the Project⁴

Prioritizing Relationship

Three components are commonly found in healthy relationships. They are space, intention, and vulnerability. A relationship seldom grows if there is not room (emotional room and scheduling priority) for it to expand. Whatever space that is given to a relationship is most effectively used when it is approached with purpose (intention). And finally, authentic relationships grow in the soil of vulnerability. It is brokenness that binds hearts together. This is true for human relationships and also for an individual's relationship with God. This project was set in a four-week structure designed to provide opportunities to grow in all three areas. Participants committed to bookend each day with scheduled appointments with God. In addition, they were encouraged to practice a suggested spiritual discipline each week. Lastly, they met once per week with a "listener" who traveled with them on their "being" journey.

The morning connection lasted 30-45 minutes and included reflecting on a short Scripture passage and journaling about its impact. These selections aligned with a theme for each week, encouraging developmental continuity (more on the themes to follow). The passages were intentionally short to provide space for

⁴ See Appendix for complete copy of the Being Project manual.

contemplation. The guidance offered for “reflective reading”⁵ attempted to engage the participant’s right-brain imagination and encouraged responsive awareness. Many missionaries with whom I have worked easily get side tracked by deconstructing Scripture passages so meticulously that they do not allow it to have transformational sway over them. Some of this emerges from a left-brain analytical imbalance in their Biblical training. As a result, most of their spiritual practices tend to be linear and sequential, engaging the part of their brain that is designed to maintain objective distance from the object of analysis. Many enter a devotional time with a hunger for connection with God (right-brain relationship) but are utilizing skills that are designed for more detached, transactional expression (left-brain analysis). When this happens it creates formidable roadblocks that often inhibit relational encounters with God. Providing just a few verses as the content to this “appointment” along with instructions that encourage the engagement of imagination, meant that participants had the space to slow down and go deeper.

The close of day appointment with God was a 10-minute Prayer of Examen modeled after St Ignatius. This built a habit of slowing down at the end of the day and reengaging the Lord. It prompted a conversation about the successes and failures of the day through questions that were focused on an awareness and responsiveness to the love of God. Each point of examination was supported by a Scripture verse. Because of my evangelical context, I felt the need to help those who might discount this part of the project as a “Catholic thing.” Scriptural references

⁵ Please refer to Bring Project in the Appendix.

provided familiar anchor points that encouraged participants to be open to, and engage more readily with spiritual practices with which they are unfamiliar.

The spiritual discipline selected for each week was designed to build the habit of expectant awareness in the lives of participants.

1. Noticing/Attentiveness
2. Awareness of self talk
3. Awareness of being wrong
4. Choosing to be second

In a doing culture people often move through the day with a relatively low level of self or God awareness. This part of the project was designed to help participants, “Pay attention to what they are paying attention to”⁶ and to use that awareness as an avenue for ongoing conversation with God. Each discipline was also aligned with the theme of the week, hoping to encourage people to keep company with God, allowing him to saturate their day.

The Role of “Listener”

Lives are meant to be lived with witnesses. Joys, challenges, victories, and sorrows are opportunities to be connected to others through empathy and comradery. Curt Thompson reminds readers that brains were designed to interact with one another. He says, “Transformation requires a collaborative interaction, with one person empathetically listening and responding to the other.”⁷ Part of the morning

⁶ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 53.

⁷ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 137.

appointment with God involved journaling. The entries included observations from Scripture, experiences from assigned exercises, and emerging thoughts participants had based upon practicing the spiritual discipline suggested for the week. Once each week they met with a partner (listener) to read from their journal. What Thompson calls, “the feeling of feeling felt” was the goal of including a listener in the Being Project.⁸

This partnering was a little tricky in my evangelical context. I did not want to promote, “the feeling of being counseled” or the “feeling of being advised” and certainly not “the feeling of being evaluated.” Often, a listener feels pressure to be more wise than present. As often as not, words offered from this posture result in the receiver of advice feeling somehow diminished and often misunderstood. In an attempt to decrease these negative experiences, the partner in this project was simply called a “listener.” The instructions given to the listener were carefully and specifically worded:

To the Listener: Please treat your role as a listener with holy confidentiality. This is a sacred place to which you are being invited. Lock arms with the Spirit to come along side your brother/sister and join them in prayer and presence.

Please resist the desire to counsel or fix. Seek the Lord for any word that you choose to offer. God is at work. Please trust His timetable and be careful with any inclination you might have to improve his “efficiency.” Deep change is often a slow process.

⁸ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 137.

This “high presence, high prayer, low advice” kind of environment was designed to be beneficial for both partners in the Being Project. For the reader these encouragements/restrictions created a safe space to be in process. Equally important, the guidelines released the listener to be fully present without the pressure of “knowing the answer.” There is great freedom in this posture. In this space the listener could join in the reader’s journey, being fully attentive without the pressure of being helpful. Thompson contends that this kind of engagement encourages people to “hear the voice of God telling them that they were safe, that they were loved, and that they have been called to a new life, new vitality and new adventure.”⁹ Prioritizing prayerful, engaged presence while limiting advice giving was designed to create an environment of transformation for reader and listener alike.

Weekly Themes

Part of the intent of the Being Project was to deconstruct existing habits of unhealthy validation and reengage right behavior as the fruit of right being (loved being). Toward this end developmentally connected themes were chosen to guide participants progressively toward healthier being. Thematic continuity came through the Scripture passages selected, the spiritual disciplines suggested, and one spiritual exercise that was provided each week.

- Week one (The Loved Self) was designed to build an environment safe enough to risk exposure. It was all about the love God has for each of his children. I have been told

⁹ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 148.

that Ignatius did not allow his followers to engage in the rigors of the “Spiritual Exercises” without taking two to three years to meditate on Scriptures celebrating the love of God. His belief was that no one could handle the level of exposure and challenge that sincere inward evaluation required without a deep confidence that they were thoroughly loved by the Father. The intent of week one was to saturate the participant with the unilateral, initiating love of God in such a way that the soil of his or her life was prepared for the plowing exposure that was to come.

- “God is our refuge and strength...” (Ps 46:1)
- “The Lord is my Shepherd...” (Ps 23:1)
- “Come to me all you who are weary...” (Matt. 11:28)

These are the messages of week one. Participants were encouraged to make space to “gaze on the beauty of the Lord” (Ps 27:4) as the first step toward healthier being.

- Week two (The Examined Self) was designed to normalize self-awareness as an important tool for spiritual formation. Curt Thomson describes emotions as the way “God most frequently addresses us.” Further he warns, “If we ignore, deny or debate these feelings, we are ignoring God’s messengers.”¹⁰ He does not contend that every emotion is a reflection of truth, but believes that every emotional experience presents an opportunity to engage God. Toward this end, and to build on a foundation of being fully loved by God, week two was an opportunity to look inside, desiring a better understanding of self. The Scriptures for this week were designed to normalize this refection. The exercise was borrowed from the “Exercises” of Ignatius and

¹⁰ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 96.

encouraged participants to create a life map that tracked joys, troubles, and seasons of rebellion.

- The theme of week three (The Humbled Self) invited openness and confronted pride. Humility is the “anti-venom” to the snake bit arrogance that Richard Foster identifies as a danger for evangelical culture. As was cited in chapter one, evangelicals have a commitment to rightly understanding the Bible. If the desire to “understand rightly” hedges toward the desire to “be right,” pride begins to erode the health of the soul.¹¹ The goal of the Scripture selections and the spiritual discipline for this week was to normalize “being wrong.” Reflecting on a passage like the Sermon on the Mount exposes the heart. Acknowledgment of being wrong is the starting point of being holy. Week three’s aim was that a healthy understanding of wrongness would highlight the grandeur of God’s love and would result in empathy toward others.
- Week four (The Given Self) invited participants to reengage “doing” as an extension of loved, aware, humbled, empathetic being. The title for the theme was borrowed from a chapter in Henri Nouwen’s *Life of the Beloved*.¹² This week was designed to be a kind of culminating celebration of the Being Project. The wonderfully ironic reality of a healthy sense of being is that it frees the believer to serve without the need for self-validation. Timothy Keller points out the freedom of such self-forgetfulness saying, “The essence of gospel humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less.”¹³ The spiritual discipline of this week

¹¹ This can be seen in 1 Cor 8 where the knowledge that the Corinthian church thinks they have has resulted in a puffed up, loveless expression.

¹² Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 105.

¹³ Timothy Keller, *The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness* (Chorely, UK: 10Publishing, 2012), LOC 278 of 430.

was simply to choose to be second, and it was rooted in the attitude of Christ referred to in Phil 2.

In summary, the themes of the four weeks progressively built. Love encouraged the confidence to be more self-aware. Self-awareness encouraged humility and empathy. Humble empathy freed the self to be given away. The first two weeks were more intensive in both structure and content. Some of the reason for this was to build the habits of awareness and conversational connection with God. Weeks three and four were intentionally less directive, allowing space to exercise a conversational responsiveness to the Spirit and providing room for unique expressions of humility and givenness to grow.

Right Brain Engagement

The “Being Project” attempted to engage spiritual formation through right brain functions. As was discussed in more detail in chapter three, right hemisphere brain functions include creativity, surprise, empathy, love, and joy. Much of what is considered the realm of relationship originates in the right lobe. What I have called “reflective reading” is borrowed from Ignatius and encourages engaging the Bible through senses and imagination.

Most evangelicals are trained to dissect and deconstruct Bible passages. Textual, literary, and historical criticism are largely left brain functions. Because the left brain is linear and sequential in nature, it anticipates the future through the experiences of the past. It is objective and efficient but risks being sterile as well. A Bible reader who is operating with left brain objectivity anticipates outcomes based on previous experiences

with the text. By inviting participants to a new way of Scripture reading, I hoped to enliven their redeemed imaginations.

Entering Scripture through redeemed imagination involved smelling, touching, and seeing in ways that made the reader vulnerable and responsive. Reflective reading required the participant to follow the Spirit into and through a passage. In doing so, the mind was opened to being surprised. Becoming Peter in the storm is very different than reading about Peter's experience. The sight and sound of the waves crashing impact the words that are exchanged between Jesus and Peter. The tone of Jesus' voice and the look on his face can stir emotional responses and provide narrative clarity not easily accessed through the left brain. The invitation to engage Scripture this way values transformation over information.

Protestant Translation

As has been mentioned previously, many of the components used in this project were borrowed from Catholic spiritual formation resources. I was concerned that the origins of the material might inhibit open engagement by Protestant participants. In an attempt to minimize obstacles, "Catholic language" was "translated," being replaced with phrases that would be more accessible to Protestants. Scripture references were liberally included to anchor suggested practices to a Biblical context. Each component of the Being Project also had a one-page educational appendix to assist the participant in clearly understanding the discipline being employed.

Evaluation: Pre Assessment and Post Assessment

Determining an evaluation tool that did not violate the spirit of this project was challenging. The introduction to the Being Project included a sincere apology for complicating the nature of this experience with the need to gather data. The health of a soul is best known over coffee and conversation, but neither fit very well into a thesis-project summary, so an evaluation tool was chosen.

Each participant received a web link to a google form for an Attachment to God Inventory (AGI)¹⁴ which was to be completed before beginning the project. Several demographic questions were added to the AGI in order to facilitate better understanding of each participant's history. The data from the pre assessment was automatically compiled in a spreadsheet when it was submitted. When each participant completed the Being Project, a post assessment AGI was completed that included several questions requiring narrative evaluation. In addition, twelve participants volunteered to answer phone interview questions eight weeks after completion of the project. The pre assessment, post assessment are recorded in Appendix C. Each participant was given an alphabetical moniker (Participant A, Participant B, etc.) for the purpose of data collection. Research observations were the result of observed changes between the pre and post assessments and were informed in greater detail by follow up interviews.

¹⁴Richard Beck and Angie McDonald, "Attachment to God: The Attachment to God Inventory, tests of working model correspondence, and an exploration of faith group differences," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 2 (2004): 92-103.

Understanding the Attachment to God Inventory:

Richard Beck and Angie McDonald are on the Psychology faculty of Abilene Christian University and Palm Beach Atlantic University, respectively. They jointly created the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) in 2003 and wrote about it in the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* in 2004.¹⁵ This assessment tool is based on the theoretical and empirical work of Lee Kirkpatrick who “persuasively argued that relationship with God can be described as an attachment bond.”¹⁶ Attachment theory originated in the 1950’s as a means to explain childhood development in respect to the child’s attachment bond to a primary caregiver. It was further developed as a means to understand the love relationships between adults in the 1980’s. Beck considers Attachment Theory, “the best psychological tool we have for investigating love.”¹⁷

Attachment Theory evaluates behavior in light of two continuums, Avoidance of Intimacy and Anxiety about Abandonment. Based on early experiences with an attachment figure (usually a parent) people establish internal working models (IWM) that impact all relationships. Functionally, this manifests in, “internalized positive notions of Self (e.g., I’m a good boy),” and/or “internalized negative views of Self (e.g., I’m a bad girl).” Every person also develops internal predispositions toward attachment figures determining “how likely we are to be cared for and how likely promises will be kept.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Beck and McDonald, Attachment to God, 92-103.

¹⁶ Beck and McDonald, Attachment to God, 92.

¹⁷ Richard Beck. “Attachment to God, Part 2: God and the Attachment Bond,” Experimental Theology, December 10, 2006, <http://experimentaltheology.blogspot.de/2006/12/attachment-to-god-part-2-god-and.html>.

¹⁸ Richard Beck. “Attachment to God, Part 1: God as Parent and Lover,” Experimental Theology, December 8, 2006, <http://experimentaltheology.blogspot.de/2006/12/attachment-to-god-part-1-god-as-parent.html>.

As is seen in Figure 1, a secure attachment is considered to score low on avoidance and low on anxiety.¹⁹

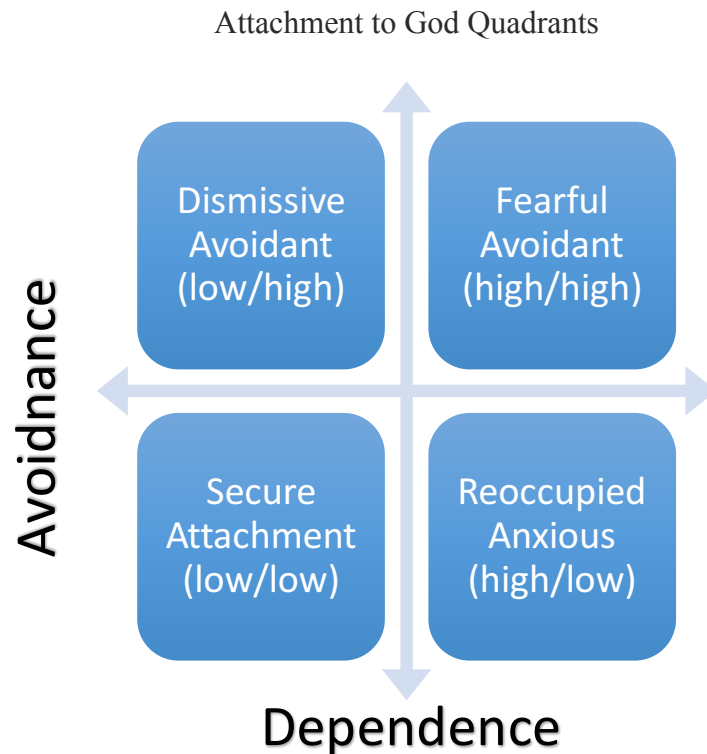


Figure 5: Attachment to God Grid

A secure attachment bond is observable when an individual exhibits a desire for engagement and is at peace in the presence of an attachment figure. “Engagement” and “Peace” are my words to positively describe low Avoidance of Intimacy and low Anxiety about Abandonment. Secure Attachment is the result of a positive view of self (low anxiety) and a positive view of the attachment figure (low avoidance). Each of the other

¹⁹ Richard Beck, “Attachment to God, Part 3: Attachment Styles and God,” Experimental Theology, December 11, 2006, <http://experimentaltheology.blogspot.de/2006/12/attachment-to-god-part-3-attachment.html>.

three quadrants in this model reflect some aspect of relationship pathology based on either a negative IWM of self, a negative IWM of the attachment figure, or a negative IWM of both.

The AGI identifies each grid quadrant with an attachment style. Each style, according to Beck and McDonald, has certain “markers” reflected in the table below (Figure 2).²⁰ The data reflected in the chart can be a bit counterintuitive as a positive IWM of self is reflected in a low AGI score. Within this construct, low avoidance and low anxiety are seen as a secure attachment. Negative IWM of self and God are expressed as high scores in the AGI.

Table 1: Attachment Styles

Attachment Style	IWM Self/ AGI score	IWM God/ AGI Score	Attachment Markers
Secure	Positive/ low	Positive/ low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little fear or concern that God would abandon them • God is experienced as trustworthy and dependable • God is a keeper of his promises • Intimacy with God is desired and sought
Insecure/ Preoccupied	Negative/ high	Positive/ low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel “not good enough” • Identify with the words “guilty,” “ashamed,” and “bad” • Fear God will reject them because of their sinfulness • Crave intimacy but it is tinged by the need to perform to gain his favor and ensure his presence
Insecure/ Dismissive	Positive/ low	Negative/ high	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reliant • Less willing to depend on God • God is “unpredictable,” “unreliable,” and “untrustworthy”

²⁰ Richard Beck, Attachment to God, Part 3.

Insecure/ Fearful	Negative/ high	Negative/ high	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach-avoidance conflict with God • Fear abandonment by God but... • Reject intimacy with God • In both pulling away and drawing close they are afraid
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Beck and McDonald patterned the AGI after an adult attachment assessment, The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale developed by K. A. Brennan, C.L. Clark, and P. R. Shaver. Assessment questions for the AGI were reworked, substituting “God” as the attachment figure in each. The AGI provides a psychologically verified statistical measurement of an individual’s perspective of “self” and of the individual’s perspective of God. These provided important fixed points of reference for the Being Project as pre assessment scores were compared with post assessment scores.

Concluding Project Development Thoughts:

The working hypothesis of this thesis-project is that doing cultures might encourage a perception of self based on productivity and that such perceptions can lead to inadequate views of God and self.

- Might a month-long intensive encounter with God and self result in the Biblical reorientation of a missionary soul?
- Might the presence of an empathetic listener and the engagement of right brain formation disciplines reform neural networks and result in a greater sense of intimacy with God and less anxiety in the life of missionary participants?
- Might an awareness of the presence of God against the backdrop of a refreshed awareness of self invite deeper engagement with God as a constant companion on the journey through any given day?

- And lastly, might this kind of soul growth be reflected in changes to the AGI assessment scores of participants before and after the Being Project.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHARTING THE WAY FORWARD

Introduction

The Being Project emerged from a desire to evaluate and address a working assumption that evangelical overseas missionaries (what I have generalized as a “knowing-going-doing” culture) are vulnerable to production based identity and that this identity, unaddressed, can disrupt intimacy with God. Knowing, going, and doing are important expressions in the evangelical stream of Christianity, but they are the overflow of a heart loved by God. They are not the focus, but the response. This project was created to help “doers” restore the core of their “being.” In the conclusion of chapter one I suggested that healthy knowing, going, and doing most productively flow from a soul/self that has learned to “be.”

- To be still.
- To be aware.
- To be attentive.
- To be humble.
- To be loved.

The Being Project was a four-week intensive designed to invite participants to a stronger, more biblical experience of “being” that overflowed in responsive activity (healthy doing).

This chapter will attempt the challenging task of quantifying the impact of the project (stillness, awareness, attentiveness, humility, and intimacy) in the lives of the 16 participants who completed the intensive. The observations offered in this chapter emerge

from numerical data gathered from participant self-assessments (AGI) and from interviews conducted with 12 of the 16 participants. I will offer general observations from trends observed within the test group and select several for closer examination. The chapter will conclude with a summary section highlighting my personal growth in this process and its impact on my pastoral care vocation.

Participant Demographic Overview

Twenty-one participants (12 men and 9 women) started the Being Project in the first week on November 2015 with the goal of completing the 30-day program by 1 January 2016. Participants started at different times based on scheduling constraints. Every participant except one (participant P) engaged the project with at least one partner. There were two groups of four participants, six pairs, and participant “P”. Nineteen of the participants identified themselves as vocational evangelical missionaries. Twelve self-identified as non denominational; however, denominational factors as potential contributing variables were not considered in the scope of this project. Of the twenty-one who started the project, sixteen finished. These were the participants from whom the research data was gathered. The age range of participants was between 24-54.

Table 2: Participant Age Demographics

Age Range	24-29	30-39	40-49	50-54
Beginning Participants	8	6	5	2
Finishing Participants	3	6	5	2

Analyzing Pre/Post AGI changes

The AGI assesses a participant's level of anxiety and their avoidance of intimacy with God. A secure relationship with God is reflected in a score of less than four on both scales. The AGI is a self assessment. As such, it includes perception variables that are difficult to isolate and mitigate. Every participant has some level of image awareness (the desire to present well) that impacts the objectivity of their responses and adds a complicating variable to any project involving self assessment. *Figure 6* reflects the difference on the anxiety scale of the AGI for each individual in the test group. Several statistical observations can be made from this data:

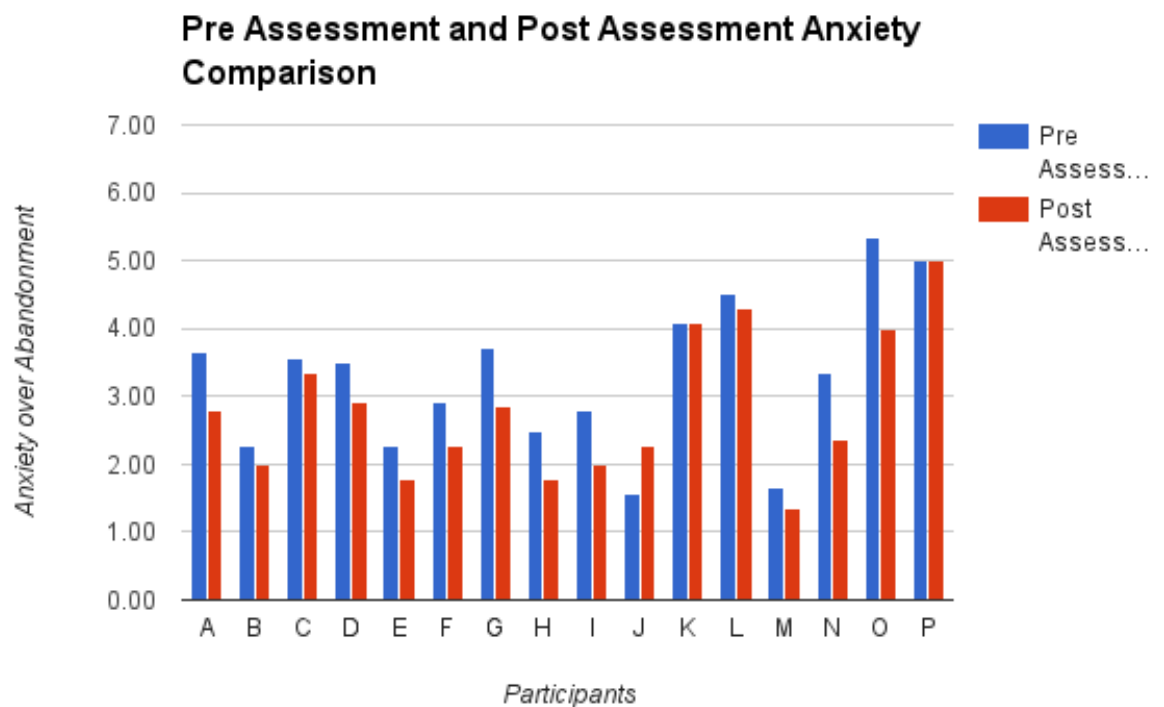


Figure 6: Pre/Post Anxiety Comparison

- 12 participants scored under four in their pre assessment indicating secure attachment before the start of the project
- 13 post assessment scores indicate less anxiety after the Being Project

- Largest anxiety decrease can be seen in Participant O
 - $5.36(\text{pre}) - 4.00(\text{post}) = 1.36$ difference
 - 19.43% less anxious
- Only one participant (J) indicated increased anxiety in the post assessment, but this participant remained well below four, which is considered “secure.”
- Average decrease of study group = .55 (7.8% less anxious)
- Pre assessment: four participants indicated + four AGI results (insecure anxiety score)
- Post assessment three participants indicated + four (insecure anxiety score)

Figure 7 reflects the pre and post assessment scores as related to avoidance of intimacy with God as the attachment figure. Similar to the anxiety indicators, there is a general decrease in avoidance (and resulting increase of experienced intimacy). Data observations are listed below the *Figure 7*.

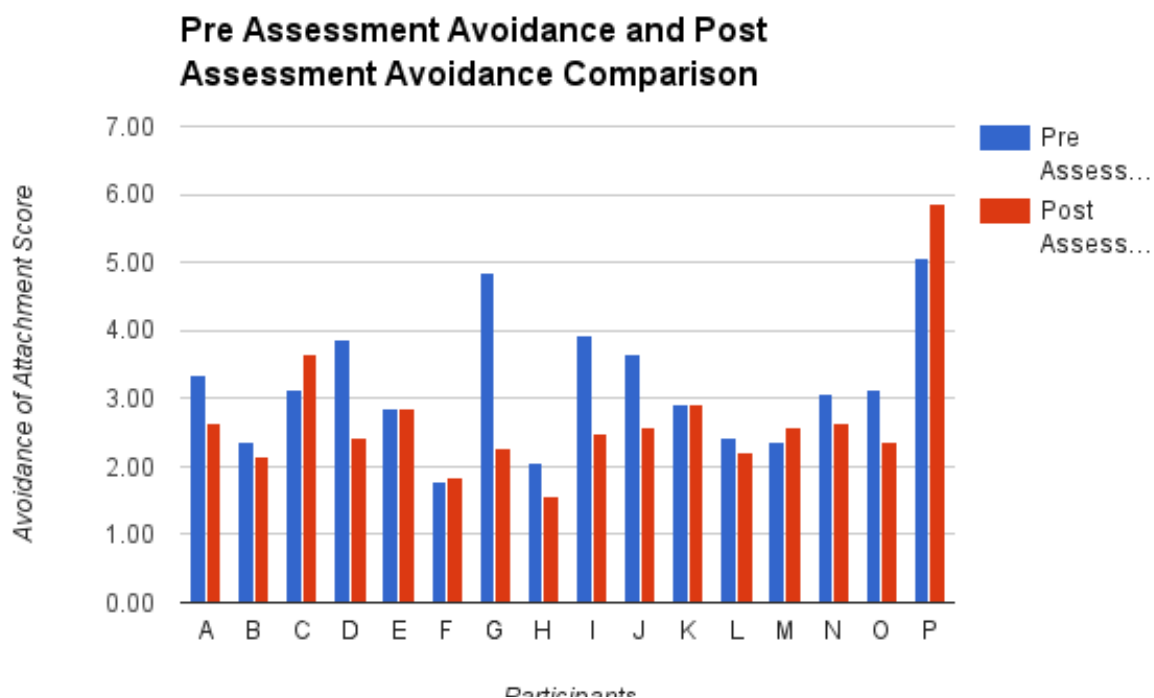


Figure 7: Pre/Post Avoidance Comparison

- 14 participants scored under four in their pre assessment indicating secure attachment before the start of the project
- 10 participants indicated less avoidance in post assessment
- Participant G indicated the most significant decrease in avoidance
 - $4.86 \text{ (pre)} - 2.29 \text{ (post)} = 2.57 \text{ difference}$
 - 36.7% less avoidant
- Four participants indicated more avoidance in post assessment
- Averaged decrease of study group = .49 point
 - 7% less avoidance
- Two participants indicated + four pre assessment (insecure avoidance score)
- One participant indicated + four post assessment (insecure avoidance score)

The anxiety and avoidance scores are combined to form X, Y coordinates in the graph below (*Figure 8*). A line connects each participant's pre-assessment (red dot) and post-assessment (blue square) coordinates, graphically representing the change in each individual's Attachment to God score. Movement from the red dot down and left toward the blue square generally represents less avoidance and less anxiety, resulting in greater attachment to God. The graph has four quadrants which are labeled with titles the AGI calls "attachment styles."

Table 3: Attachment Style Coordinate Scoring

AGI Attachment Style		Anxiety Coordinate	Avoidance Coordinate
Secure		Less than four	Less than four
Dismissive-Avoidant		Less than four	Greater than four
Fearful-Avoidant	Greater than four	Greater than four	
Preoccupied Avoidant	Greater than four	Less than four	

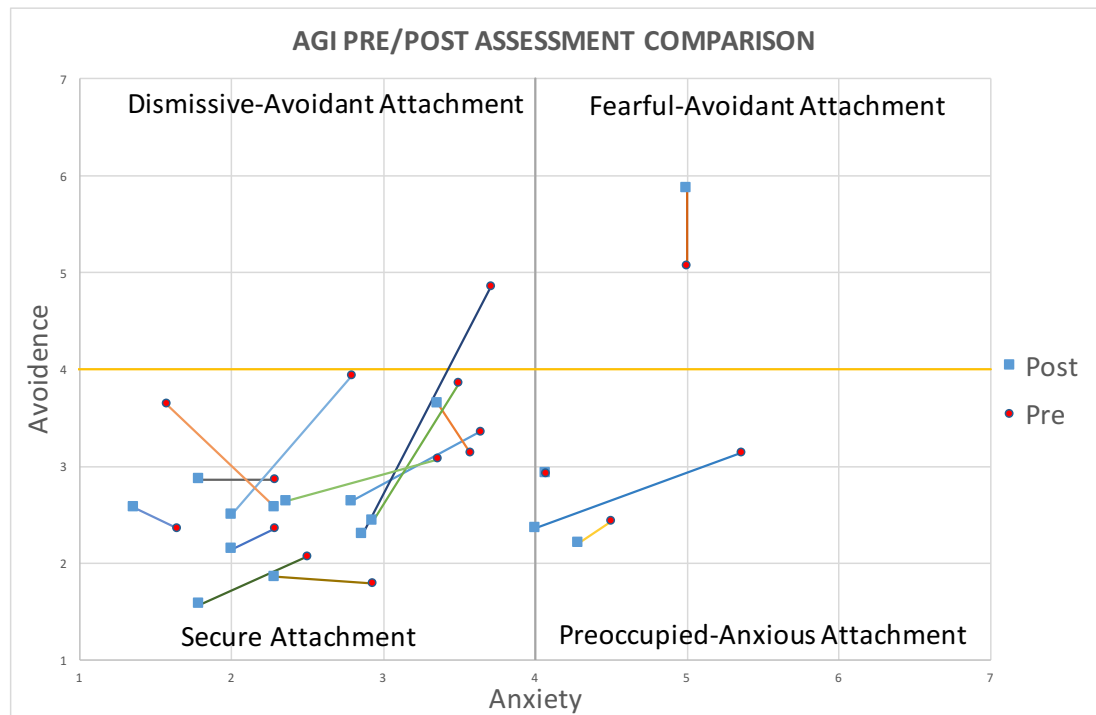


Figure 8: Pre/Post Composite AGI Score Change

Several observations are worth noting from the above chart:

- 11 participants indicated “secure attachment” as defined by the AGI in pre assessment.
- 14 of 16 participants indicated movement toward greater attachment to God in at least one measured scale.
- 10 participants indicated movement toward greater attachment to God on both measured scales.

Internal Working Models

Attachment Theory contends that a person’s earliest attachments create Internal Working Models (IWM) of the *self* and the *other* (primary caregiver). These IWM form a subconscious awareness of how relationships work: what can and cannot be expected. *Figure 9* overlays identical data from *Figure 8* with the categories of Internal Working Models.

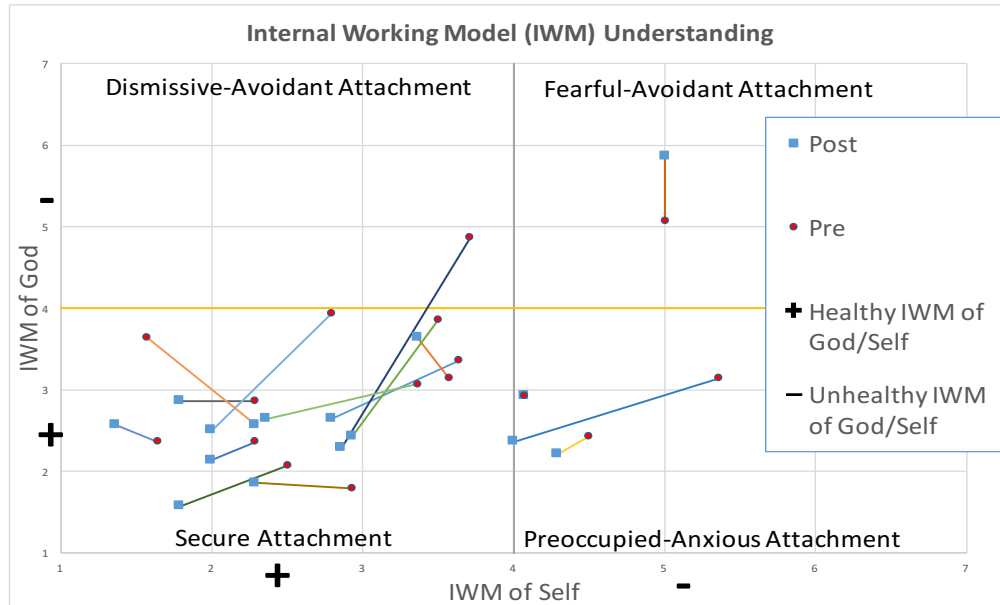


Figure 9: Pre/Post Assessment Scores with IWM

It is expected that the markers associated with each AGI style of relating¹ will present in the lives of participants whose scores are within that quadrant. Eleven of the sixteen participants have pre and post project scores that place them within the secure relationship quadrant, meaning that their general IWM for both God and self are positive. Five members of the test group scored within the three insecure relationship quadrants.

- The pre-assessment score of participant “G” plotted within the Dismissive-Avoidant quadrant. This quadrant is characterized by a low anxiety score, combined with a high avoidance score and is expressed through self-reliant behavior based on the assumption that God (the attachment figure) is either unpredictable, unreliable, or untrustworthy. His post-assessment avoidance score

¹ See chapter four.

decreases dramatically, moving into the secure quadrant. The expectation would be for this participant to experience significantly more intimacy with God as a result.

- Participant “P” began the Being Project with an AGI score in the Fearful-Avoidant quadrant. His post assessment reflected an increase in his avoidance score suggesting a decreasing intimacy with God. This quadrant is characterized by chronic approach-avoidance with God. The AGI indicates that participant “P” fears abandonment by God but also rejects intimacy with him. He has a low confidence in God’s trustworthiness and his own. It may be that the nature of the Being Project stimulated a perception of God as less dependable or less trustworthy, causing an increased avoidance score. It also may be that a 30-day intensive does not provide a sufficient sample size to draw firm conclusions. Certainly, the assessment invites questions and concern, but definitive conclusions must be resisted. It is worth noting that Participant “P” engaged the Being Project alone. He did not have the benefit of a listener. In his post-assessment interview, he indicated enjoying the project. He also reported that he had changed jobs during the 30 days and was experiencing higher than normal stress. It is also important to recognize that most Christians go through seasons where God seems distant and unapproachable. In many cases, these dry times serve to enhance the believer’s longing for the Lord and heighten the desire for his presence.
- Participants “K”, “L,” and “O” all have pre-assessment scores in the Preoccupied-Anxious quadrant, indicating that they have a negative IWM of themselves and a

healthy IWM of God. The post-project assessments reflect very different experiences for each.

- Participant “K” makes no movement at all.
- Participant “L” indicates a slight movement toward a more positive IWM of herself.
- Participant “O” indicates a drastic decrease in her AGI anxiety score that suggests a more positive IWM of herself. One would expect a decrease in bad feelings about self and fewer experiences of shame in her life.

Turning Numbers to Narrative

That 11 participants (68%) scored in the “secure attachment” quadrant on their pre assessment was initially surprising since the working hypothesis is based on an evangelical missions culture that needs greater attachment to God. That said, five participants (32%) scored outside the secure quadrant. I live in a community of about 500 missionaries (nine of whom participated in this project). If the ratio of this project is accurate then 160 missionaries within my community deal with some form of insecure relationship with God. It is also worth noting that two participants scored in the secure quadrant on their pre assessment but the words they offered to describe their relationship with God leave room for questions (*Table 4*).

Table 4: Comparing Numbers and Narrative

Participant	AGI Pre assessment Anxiety/Avoidance	Self- Assessment
Participant C	3.57/3.14	Impasse, Pivotal Point
Participant N	3.36/3.07	Foggy, Under Scrutiny

The apparent disparity is worth noticing. Perhaps these participants felt more freedom to talk about their spiritual state than they did to report about it on the assessment. If that is the case, then the percentage of participants with an insecure starting point approaches 45%. In either case, the number is significant.

Sixty percent (three of five) of the participants who recorded insecure attachment scores scored in the Preoccupied quadrant indicating a negative IWM of self and a positive IWM of God. This deserves broader research in the future. It may be that the evangelical missions tradition somehow supports a high view of God that collaterally diminishes the identity of his children.

Certainly the strong trend among participants was toward the lower left quadrant of the AGI scoring graph. This indicates that, in general, participants answered the questions on the AGI post-project inventory indicating a more secure relationship with God. “More secure” equates to less anxiety and less avoidance of intimacy. That said, it is difficult to quantify what the test group average 7% decrease actually looks like. Does a 7% decrease matter appreciably? Did participant “O” experience a deeper sense of peace from the almost 20% decrease in her anxiety score? Did God feel more approachable to participant “G” commensurate to his 36% post project decrease on the avoidant scale?

Post-project interviews provided a way to compare numerical change with experiential reality. The last question of the interview asked participants to reflect on several words that each had given in the pre-assessment inventory to describe their relationship with God. Each was given the opportunity to amend, change, or clarify these words from a post-project frame of reference.

- Participant “O” (who experienced the most significant anxiety decrease, 1.36 or 19.42%) chose “confused,” “hopeful,” “gentle,” and “emotional” in her pre-assessment. While she could not articulate direct awareness of decreased anxiety, she did add the word “trusting” to her post-assessment description of her relationship with God.²
- Participant “G” was above the test group average in anxiety decrease (.85 or 12.4%) and, as has been previously cited, had the most significant scoring change on either scale in his avoidance variable (2.57 or 36.7%). His pre assessment described his relationship with God as “erratic,” “relatively weak,” and “undeveloped.” In the post-project interview participant “G” provided further self assessment in regards to his pre-project posture toward God and others, saying, “Before starting I found it hard to be completely honest with God and my friends about doubts and issues I have with my theology and view of life as a whole. My relationship with the Lord was still suffering from old wounds of mistrust and dishonesty from bad experiences within various churches.”³ His personal narrative reflects the mistrust that his high pre-project AGI avoidance score suggests. His post-project reflections highlight the dramatic shift in his avoidance score. Among the test group, participant “G” made the strongest direct correlation between the Being Project and his increased intimacy with God. “As these experiences built upon each other I felt our relationship reach new heights and gave me a sense of trust in sharing with God about things I might not normally pray about. The verses that were selected were excellent and really helped to

² Participant O, Interview by author, Kandern, Germany, April 28, 2016.

³ Participant G, Facebook message to author, May 10, 2016.

facilitate the openness and honesty that resulted in my closer relationship with God.”⁴ The post-project narrative of participant “G” provides a picture of what a 36.7% avoidance decrease looks like. His experience impacted his relationship with God as well as his relationships with his supporting community as is reflected in this excerpt from his interview. “Since the trial (Being Project) finished I have noticed that my openness and honesty with others has also increased. My relationship with members of my small group and subsequent meeting with (participant “J”) have also become more personal and I’ve expressed my feelings with honesty and far less hesitation.”⁵ The post-project comments of Participant “G” reflect secure attachment markers consistent with his AGI decrease:

- Little fear or concern that God would abandon him
 - God is experienced as trustworthy and dependable
 - God is a keeper of his promises
 - Intimacy with God is desired and sought
- Participant “D” experienced a .57 decrease in his anxiety score, slightly higher than the .55 average decrease of the test group. His avoidance score change, however, was almost triple that of the group average, decreasing by over 20% (1.43 change). His pre-assessment words describing his relationship with God were: “willing,” “open,” “desiring more from God,” “not consistently listening or purposeful.” Post project, he added that he “felt more centered” and was more

⁴ Participant G, Facebook message to author, May 10, 2016.

⁵ Participant G, Facebook message to author, May 10, 2016.

aware of his need for the Lord. Attachment Theory contends that a secure attachment happens when the attachment figure (God, in this case) is seen as a “secure base for exploration.”⁶ Participant “D” experienced a greater sense of centeredness after completing the project. This kind of stability might be seen as resulting from a renewed awareness of God as a “secure base” from which to experience the world and to whom participant “D” can return to re-establish equilibrium in challenging seasons. Also, for participant “D” “centered” was a term of connection that contrasted his pre-project assessment “not consistently listening or purposeful.”⁷ Viewing a relationship through a lens of purposefulness risks sliding into a transactional way of thinking. Buber would relegate purposefulness to the realm of “I-It” relating, while the connection of a word such as “centered” leans toward “I-you.”

- Participant “N” is a self-described “doer” who places significant performance expectations on herself and others. Her avoidance score decreased slightly less than the test group average (.43 or 6.14%) but, her anxiety score decrease was almost twice that of the test group (1.00 or 14.29%). Her pre-assessment words describing her relationship with God were “foggy” and “under scrutiny.” In her interview she added that after the project she felt more vulnerable and that the vulnerability felt somehow “safer” than her pre-project reality. Decreased anxiety indicates a bolstered sense of self-confidence in terms of this participant’s IWM.

It is possible that when a “doer” spends a month soaking in Scripture that

⁶ Richard Beck and Angie McDonald, “Attachment to God: The Attachment to God Inventory, tests of working model correspondence, and an exploration of faith group differences,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 2 (2004): 92.

⁷ Participant D, Interview by author, Kandern, Germany, April 18, 2016.

confirms God's love for her, she experiences reduced pressure to define herself through performance. This in turn might express itself in a vulnerability that feels safer and could have direct impact on her relationship with God and others.⁸

- Participant "B" indicated a secure attachment before she began the project and decreased slightly (4.14% less anxiety and 3.14% avoidance) on both scales. Her pre-project words were "connected," "seeking," and "being loved." In her post-project interview she articulated a sense of being "washed over by the love of God," "embraced," and "pursued." Her post-assessment scores indicate slightly more secure attachment. Her intimate, expressive, post-project description of her experience of God introduces the idea that the intensive focus of the Being Project can be beneficial to those already scoring as securely attached.⁹
- Participant "F" had an above average decrease on her anxiety scale (.64 or 9.14%) and a significantly above average decrease on her avoidance scale (1.00 or 14.29%). She chose "loving," "honest," "close," and "scary" as pre-project descriptions of her relationship with God. In her post-project interview she revisited the word "scary," indicating that it was a result of her life circumstances at the time of the project. She went on to say that she was still in that space but that "there was more cushion around that word (scary)." What she describes as "cushion" reflects the attachment idea of "secure base." Secure attachment enables a child to engage the wider world with confidence, returning to their attachment figure for encouragement, equilibrium, and confidence. Similarly, as participant "F" became 14% less avoidant (God feeling more accessible to her),

⁸ Participant N, Interview by author, Kandern, Germany, April 21, 2016.

⁹ Participant B, Interview by author, Kandern, Germany, April 19, 2016.

she experienced the “scariness” of her life within the context of his available presence.¹⁰

- Participant “I” scored above the average decrease of the study group on his anxiety scale (.79 or 11.28%) and significantly above the group average on his avoidance scale (1.43 or 20.42%). His pre-project descriptive words were “steady,” “necessary,” “rich,” and “not enough.” He changed the word “necessary” to “needed” in his post-project interview. He explained the change as wanting to find a “more emotive word” that communicated “personal desire.”¹¹ One of the experiential results of the Being Project for participant “I” was defining his desire for God in more emotional terms. This right brain engagement is of particular interest since his pre-project word “necessary” was chosen for more left brain (evaluative, prioritizing) reasons. One of the goals of this project was to engage right brain processing. This could be an indication that for participant “I” that goal was achieved.
- Participant “K” posted pre and post-assessment AGI scores that were identical. While there were slight variations in her answers, her AGI score did not change as a result of her participation in the Being Project. This suggests that, according to AGI scales, she did not experience increased intimacy with God as a result of the project. In her pre-assessment she described her relationship with God as, “growing,” important,” and “inconsistent.” In her post-project interview she added the word “hopeful.” In the interview she also identified herself as an introverted, phlegmatic temperament, meaning that she tends toward a people-

¹⁰ Participant F, Interview by author, Kandern, Germany, April 21, 2016.

¹¹ Participant I, Interview by author, Skype call, April 27, 2016.

pleasing, conflict-avoidant bent, and that she is most comfortable in her own company. She also said that she struggles to believe in herself and finds it difficult to believe that all the good things that God says about his children he really feels toward her. These feelings align with the markers of the “preoccupied-anxious” quadrant of the AGI graph, and, taken together, might create a perfect storm as far as transformation is involved. In participant “K” we find a person who wrestles with significant personal doubt about her worthiness to be loved, wants to keep turmoil (both intra and inter-personal) to a minimum, gravitates toward isolation, and is uncomfortable with vulnerability. Her internal doubts exist in the vacuum of her introversion. She did indicate high perceived value in meeting with a listener but confessed that the vulnerability was uncomfortable. The combined impact of these variables may make participant “K” someone who engages the prospect of change and transformation slowly and cautiously.¹²

- Participant “P” was the only member of the test group to score as “Fearful-Avoidant” according to the AGI. As has been previously mentioned, he did not engage the project with a listener. He reported that he talked often with others about what he was learning from the experience but he did not get the benefit of a dedicated processing partner. His experience invites the question about how significant partnership is for the spiritual journey. Many participants considered the weekly listener meeting a high value to their experience.¹³ It may be that, in spite of the stimulating chats that participant “P” enjoyed during the Being Project, he would have benefited more from the prescribed connection with an

¹² Participant K, Interview by author, Kandern, Germany, May 11, 2016.

¹³ See *Figure 13*.

empathetic listener. By design, these moments of empathetic companionship provided weekly opportunities for participants to experience a secure attachment.

Participant “P” may have needed this the most.

- Participants “H” and “M” started and finished the project indicating a highly secure attachment with God. Among the test group they reflected the most secure attachment. Both have a self-identified doing bent, but both have also experienced significant physical trauma requiring a reorientation of their natural predisposition. Participant “H” said that being in rehab¹⁴ forced the issue of confronting her need to learn to express her love for God and receive his love for her in new ways. She had been previously unaware of this problem, but significant physical limitations exposed her “need to be impressive.” She needed to redefine productivity. She wondered if some of her subconscious motivation to earn God’s love by effort was rooted in her evangelical upbringing.¹⁵ Participant “M” views his physical limitations as “God breaking me from my own ability to accomplish.”¹⁶ For both participant “H” and participant “M” circumstances have blocked them from the satisfaction previously experienced through activity and accomplishment. They have had to learn to relate with God, to serve God, to love God, and to be loved by God with greater attention to “being.” The AGI scores them as the most intimately attached of anyone in the test group.

¹⁴ Participant “H” experienced an accident when she was in her early 20s that left her wheel chair bound.

¹⁵ Participant H, Interview by author, Kandern, Germany, April 19, 2016.

¹⁶ Participant M, Interview by author, Phone call, April 27, 2016.

Evaluating the Method

In the post-project assessment, participants were asked about their familiarity with each of the five components of the Being Project. A score of one reflected a participant being unfamiliar with the component and a five that the participant was very familiar.

Figure 10 reflects the test group average responses. On the whole, the test group reported a moderate familiarity (3.1 on a scale of 5) with the components. There does not seem to be any statistical significance to evaluating post AGI scores based the variable of a participant's familiarity with the components of the project.

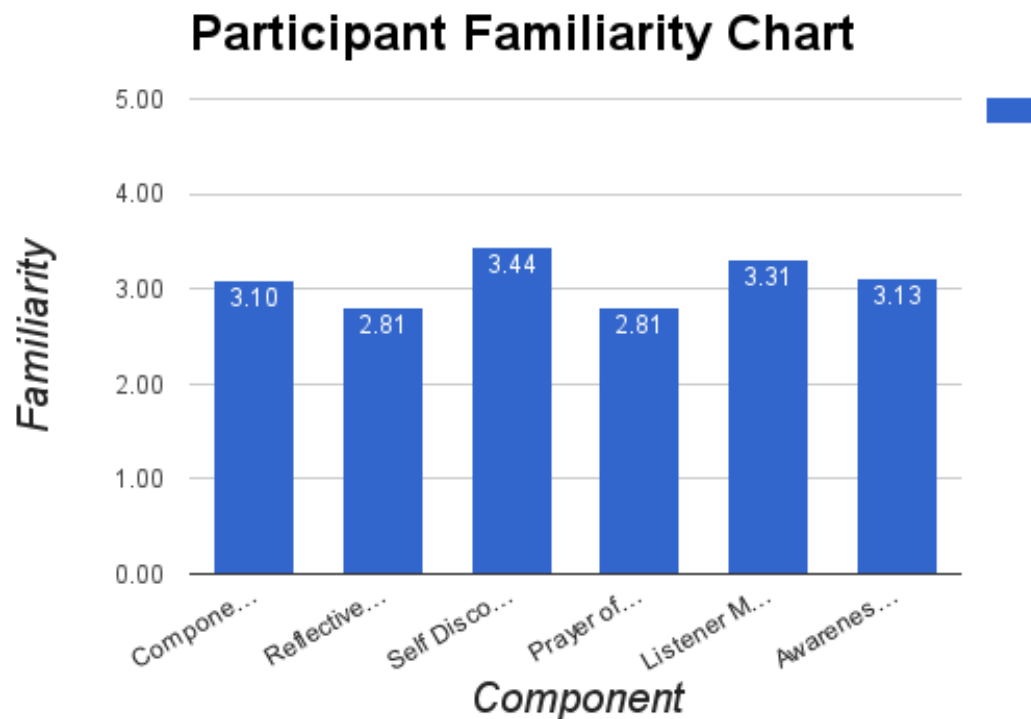


Figure 10: Participant Familiarity

The post assessment also asked the test group to rate the perceived value of each of the components in reference to “stimulating intimacy with God.” The test group averages are reflected in *Figure 11*. The test group combined rating for the whole project was tallied by averaging each of the individual component averages, resulting in a

relatively high 3.8 perceived value for the project as a whole. Not surprisingly for an evangelical test group, the components that focused on the Word (Reflective Reading) and the Body (listener meeting) were most highly rated at 4.38 and 4.2 respectively. It is interesting that the test group was least familiar (2.82 average) with the style of reading that was involved in the project but considered it as most valuable (4.38). Each participant's individual rating can be seen in *Figures 12-16*. *Figure 12* shows the strong perceived value of the reflective reading component as 15 participants scored either a four or five. A similar perceived value can be observed in *Figure 16*, as 12 in the test group rated meeting with a listener as either a four or five. The Prayer of Examen was the component that the test group deemed least valuable (average rating 3.19) but, as *Figure 14* reflects, some participants highly valued this component and others did not. It seems that Examen was polarizing in terms of its value to the test group.

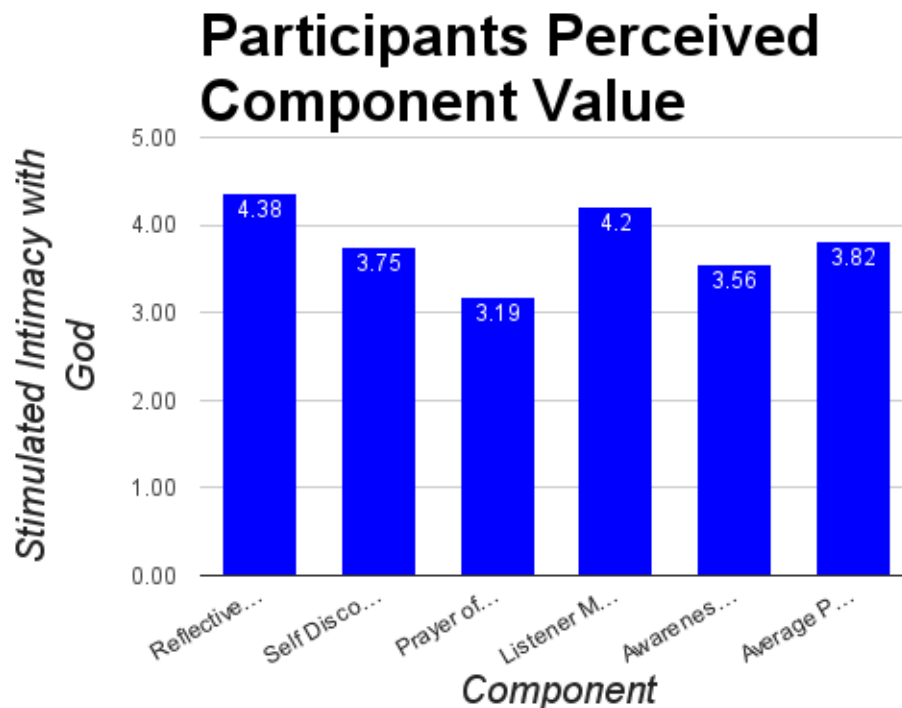


Figure 11: Average Perceived Value for Components

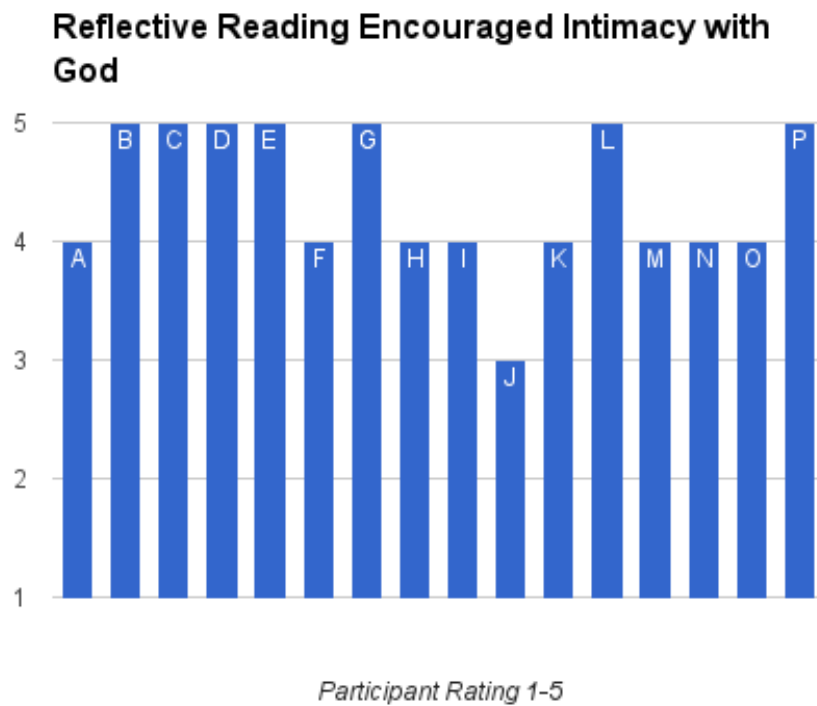


Figure 12: Value of Reflective Reading



Figure 13 Value of Weekly Exercises

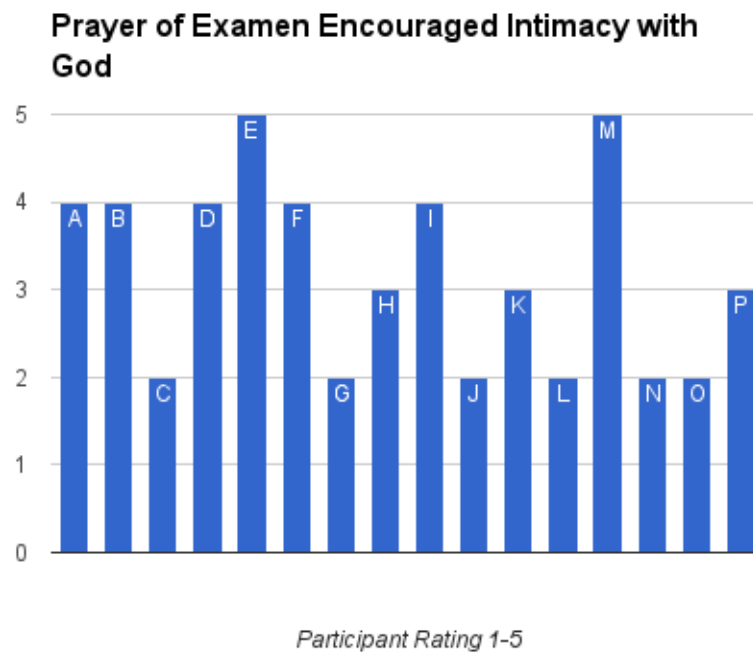


Figure 12: Value of Examine

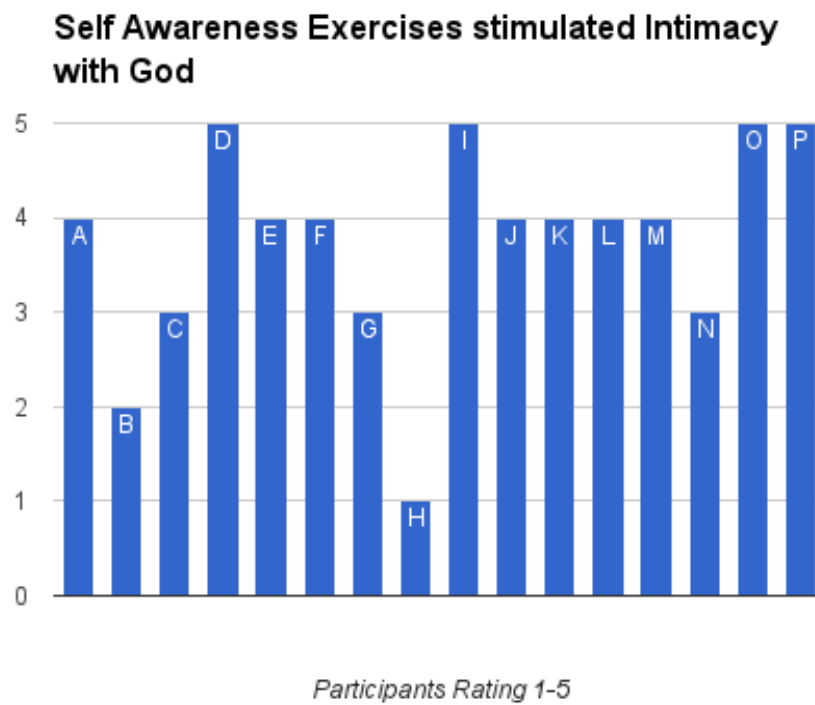


Figure 13: Value of Self-Awareness Exercises

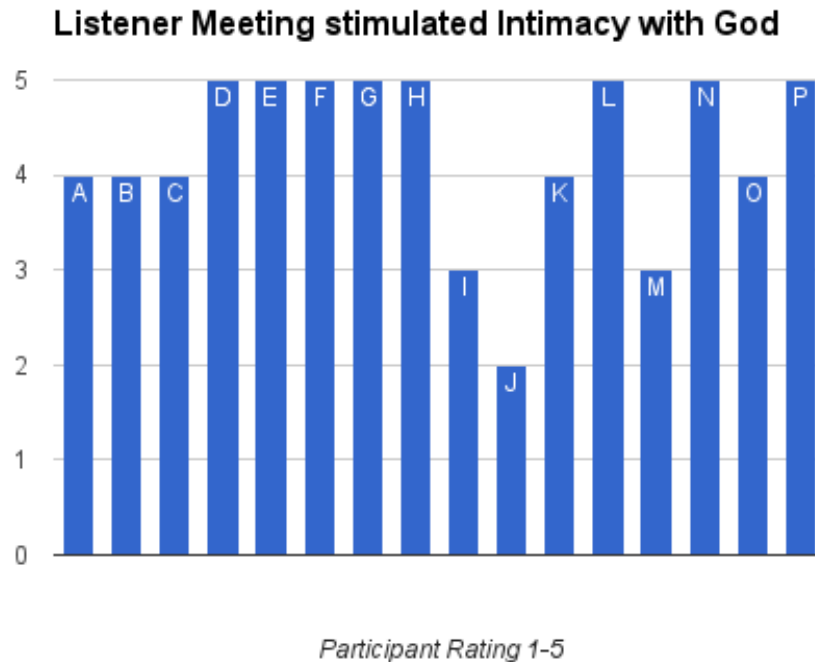


Figure 14: Value of Listener Meeting

Thesis-Project Summary:

My heart was invested in this project from the outset. I care deeply about the vitality and soul care of missionaries. My personal and professional experiences informed the focus of the project. Many faithful, committed missionaries serve God while allowing their soul to wither. I believe that this is largely due to a spiritual numbness that emerges from just doing the next thing without intentional spiritual awareness. I designed the Being Project to address this issue and hoped it would stimulate an intimate renewal within participants. I have been pleased with the test group responses, reflected in both assessments (AGI) and interviews. The number of people who have used or are currently using the Being Project is much larger than the sample size reflected in this paper. That

said, the project has proven less valuable in terms of identifying best practices for missionary soul care or isolating issues that might help improve missionary soul care. There were simply too many variables and not enough controls in the project for the results to be too definitive. So to the question, “Did people grow in their intimacy with God?”, the answer is yes! The discussion of why, exactly, that growth took place is less clear. There are, however, several observations that seem significant.

Evangelicalism as a Knowing-Going-Doing Culture:

This project did not set out to conclusively redefine evangelicalism by these terms, but did attempt to operate with an awareness of them as significant influencing factors in the minds of many missionaries. Engagement with this issue is antidotal, but several observations deserve noting.

Knowing—Ninety-four percent of the test group expressed strong perceived value in the reflective reading component of the Being Project. This part of the project engaged “knowing” from a right brain perspective, involving the imagination and the senses. The test group as a whole indicated that this practice was not a familiar one to them. Many commented in post-project interviews that their normal practice of Scripture engagement was more linear and sequential in nature (left brain processes). This is simply a different kind of knowing than the relational knowing at the heart of the Being Project. Many participants indicated a desire to periodically augment their normal Bible reading with more reflective practices. While it is difficult to measure the analytical knowing bent of evangelical missions culture, it deserves more careful evaluation in regard to its impact on spiritual formation.

Going—Ninety-four percent of the test group live overseas and have embraced the identity of “one who goes.” This project did not significantly measure the presence or impact of a self-definition that includes leaving behind perceived comfort for the sake of spiritual calling.

Doing—Sixty-seven percent of those interviewed post-project described themselves as “doers.” Several self-identified their tendency to bolster their identity through productiveness. The vast majority of the test group valued the opportunity to slow down while also communicating that it was difficult to do so. Productivity as a determiner of value is so deeply ingrained in western culture and in the western church that it must be a central component of any discussion about spiritual formation. While statistical data was not gathered to confirm this assumption during the project, the strong indication from participants was that the opportunity to be more reflective and the discipline of carving out more space to relate with God was a positive experience.

Integrating Right Brain Function into the Spiritual Formation Discussion—At the beginning of this project I wrote about knowing, going, and doing as equally defining characteristics of evangelical missions culture. My understanding of the three issues has changed. I would now suggest that knowing has a primary catalytic role that impacts both going and doing. They are not equal. If knowing is pursued through the objectivity of left brain function, then it is bent toward the realm of mastery and clinical clarity. This kind of *knowing* is not sufficient to sustain a soul that was designed to be *known*¹⁷. In an environment of left brain knowing, both going and doing are often hijacked to bolster an individual’s identity and relational security. The problem does not reside in the going and

¹⁷ Paul addresses the issue of knowing and being known in Gal 4:9 and 1 Cor 8:1-3.

doing activities themselves, but these activities are not designed to sustain core issues of identity. They are expressions of whole brain, integrated knowing and being known.

Going and doing overflow from a knowing that is both objectively informed (left brain function) and also relationally connected (right brain function). This kind of integrated *knowing* requires more attention to be given to spiritual formation practices that engage creativity, story, imagination, and the senses.

Knowing-Going-Doing priorities will be expressed in Insecure Attachment to God–

The Being Project did not confirm this expected outcome. In fact, it confirmed the opposite. Sixty-eight percent of the test group scored within the realm of secure attachment to God before the project began. This suggests that the evangelical missionaries are, by and large, healthy in terms of their attachment to God. This statistic must be qualified by two mitigating variables:

Image Awareness: As was mentioned in chapter 1, missionaries live very public lives and tend to be very aware of the perceptions of others. It is possible that image awareness could skew the data to reflect a more positive image of missionaries as a whole. This is a variable with any research that involves self-assessment.

Theology and Experience: One of the questions in the post-project interview asked participants to rate their current relationship with God on a scale of one-seven. One participant responded with a chuckle that she was an “eight” and went on to explain that she was a Calvinist!¹⁸ This humorous moment exposes the “fact-faith feeling” conundrum faced by many Christians. Right thinking about God usually trumps authentic

¹⁸ Participant H, Interview by author, Kandern, Germany, April 18, 2016.

reflection on personal experience. This must be considered as a variable in this project since sometimes “right” can trump “real.”

32%: While most of the test group reflected a secure attachment to God, 32% did not.

That is a significant number. In most settings 68% success in not thought of as a favorable result. Creating environments for professional ministers to enjoy the space to “be” is important to their (100% of them) spiritual formation.

In Pursuit of Increased Responsive Awareness– Chapter one established the aim of the Being Project as increasing “responsive awareness” in the lives of participants. While most participants expressed an appreciation of growing awareness during the project, it was difficult to determine the ongoing presence or absence of this through a survey or an interview. Several participants appreciated the opportunity to grow in their awareness of what they were aware of, confessing that the gravitational pull of life is simply to do the next thing. Self-awareness and God-awareness are essential disciplines to cultivate if spiritual vitality is to exist outside of a person’s designated devotional time. Without a doubt, this is a long-term growth process.

Listener Love– Most of the test group indicated meeting with a listener as a significant part of their experience. Dr. Curt Thompson points out, “Patients often tell me that even though they don’t trust others, at least they trust God. That simply isn’t true. We all tend to do with God exactly what we do with people in our lives.”¹⁹ Psychologists confirm the parallelism that exists between spiritual and relational arenas saying, “it is not possible to separate implicit relational processes from ‘spiritual processes,’ or, stated differently, to separate ‘psychological’ and ‘spiritual’ domains of functioning. They are inextricably

¹⁹ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2010), 83.

intertwined.”²⁰ The role of a “listener” as a safe, empathetic presence was crucial because each participant needed to feel heard and understood during the intensive. These weekly experiences provided emotional roots for the project. As participants engaged their false selves or mapped their lives, they inevitably confronted shame. The value of a companion to be present (not to counsel or advise) with each participant cannot be overstated. In a very real way, the empathy experienced in these meetings, personified the love of God that was the focus of the Being Project.

Being Project Conclusions

- Might a month-long intensive encounter with God and Self result in a Biblical reorientation of a missionary soul?
 - Both the AGI and post-project interviews indicated that the Being Project encouraged greater intimacy with God among most participants. Creating a program conducive to “being” was generally appreciated by the test group though many also commented that it was difficult. A “slow soak” in Scriptures that centered around the love of God combined with self-discovery exercises were a welcomed change of pace for many in the test group. The content of the Being Project will be packaged for different delivery systems (group retreats, personal retreats, extended personal devotions) in the future. It may be that the integration of a more relational

²⁰ Todd W. Hall, Annie Fujikawa, Sarah R. Halcrow, Peter C. Hill, and Harold Delaney, *Attachment to God and Implicit Spirituality: Clarifying Correspondence and Compensation Models*, *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 37, no 4 (2009): 232.

priority of spiritual formation within evangelical missions culture is best pursued on multiple fronts.

- The test group did not identify a direct link between the decrease in anxiety and avoidance and specific elements of the project. Many did, however, resonate with more emotive, intimate words when speaking of their relationship with God. Perhaps, right brain spiritual formation practices resulted in greater felt intimacy with God.
- Might the presence of an empathetic listener and the engagement of right brain formation disciplines reform neural networks and result in a greater sense of intimacy with God and less anxiety in the life of missionary participants?
 - There are too many variables in the Being Project to speak definitively to what caused the general movement toward greater felt intimacy. Certainly the listener component was rated with a high perceived value by the test group. The listener's role to provide presence rather than advice made this experience unique for many in the test group. Parker Palmer says, "The human soul doesn't want to be advised or fixed or saved. It simply wants to be witnessed — to be seen, heard and companioned exactly as it is."²¹ This was the aim of the listener component of the project.
- Might an awareness of the presence of God against the backdrop of a refreshed awareness of self invite deeper engagement with God as a constant companion on the journey through any given day?
 - Most of the test group struggled with this part of the project. Many

²¹ Parker J Palmer, "The Gift of Presence, The Perils of Advice," On Being, May 12, 2016, <http://www.onbeing.org/blog/the-gift-of-presence-the-perils-of-advice/>.

identified the struggle as valuable, but not enough data was compiled in the interviews to reach any meaningful conclusion. Even though the data was inconclusive, keeping company with God is an important expression of a forming soul. Dallas Willard says that “in the progress of God’s redemptive work communication advances into communion and communion into union. When the progression is complete we can truly say, ‘It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me’ (Gal2:20).”²² I would like to humbly add a fourth component to Willard’s summary of sanctification: awareness. In both the research for this thesis-project and the interviews associated with it, the value (and relative absence) of the awareness of God’s presence has surfaced. I submit that awareness prepares the soil of conversation which develops into communion and union.

- Lastly, might this kind of soul growth be reflected in changing AGI assessment scores before and after the Being Project?
 - Using an evaluation tool was a challenging part of this project. I was concerned that involving metrics would compromise any personal value that the test group might receive.
 - The AGI, however, served to confirm and clarify the post-project interviews and visa-versa. Of particular help within the realm of pastoral care for missionaries are the attachment markers associated with each

²² Dallas Willard, *In Search of Guidance: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984). A second edition of this book was published by HarperSanFrancisco in 1993. A third edition was published as *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), 155.

quadrant of the AGI grid. The markers serve as helpful reference points to identify missionaries struggling with insufficient IWM of self or of God.

- The AGI does carry with it a stigma of pathology within the three quadrants considered “insecure.” As my research continued, I discovered that one of the authors of the AGI (Beck) has created a construct similar to the AGI but with generous space for struggling Christians (*Figure 17*). The AGI’s measured variables are anxiety and avoidance. This model measures complaint and communion. The advantage of this model is that it makes allowance for seasons of struggle and for Christians who have a melancholy temperament. In both cases a person can be on the complaint side of the scale and still be in high communion with God. Beck calls these people “Winter Christians.” He says that he wanted to create a model that did not view difficulties with God as always unhealthy.²³ There is currently no published measurement tool to support this model, but the construct provides helpful categories for ongoing discussion.

²³ Richard Beck, “Summer and Winter Christians”, *Experimental Theology*, April 11, 2016, <http://experimentaltheology.blogspot.de/2007/04/summer-and-winter-christians.html/>.

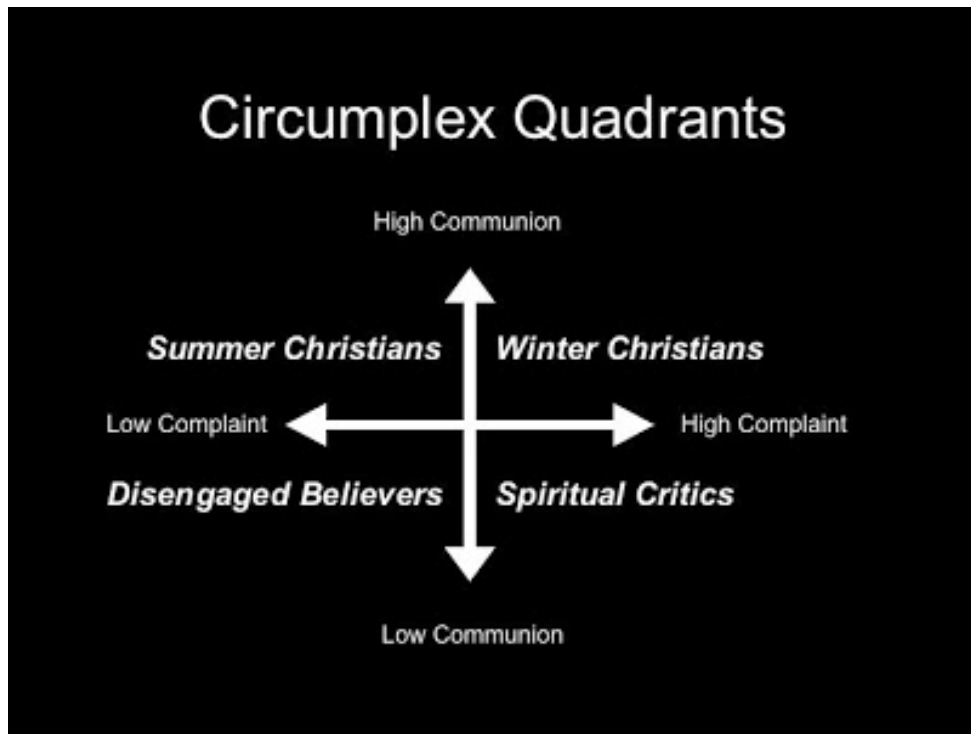


Figure 15: Summer and Winter Christians

Source: Richard Beck, "Summer and Winter Christians", *Experimental Theology*, April 11, 2016, <http://experimentaltheology.blogspot.de/2007/04/summer-and-winter-christians.html/>.

My Personal Being Journey

I am a self-described "ideas guy," fascinated by all things new, creative, and novel. That makes me very fun to be around...unless you want to actually get something done. This project has required me to, not just "circle the airport" with endless ideas and wonderings about missionary soul formation, but to actually "land the plane." The need to synthesize, support, prioritize, and communicate my convictions about the healthy missionary soul has been enormously valuable personally and vocationally. Like most people who engage a project of this magnitude, my own growth eclipses that of anyone who might read this thesis-project.

I am fascinated by the brain and by researchers who contend that, as far as brain chemistry is concerned, humans were made to connect! It is so exciting for me when my theology (God is Trinity, and the heart of the universe is love) meshes with objective scientific discovery and resonates with my longings more deeply than I know how to describe. My engagement with people has changed with the realization that it is my presence they need, not my great ideas or Biblical wisdom. I desire my words to be fewer and my love to flow more robustly through the empathetic silence of my participation in a moment. If Curt Thomson is correct, authentic, caring presence can redefine neural pathways linked to shame and reorganize them based on love. That one person can participate in reforming another's negative IWM is a life-altering realization. That this transformation has much more to do with loving connection than wise, wonderful counsel is personally challenging.

I have a budding fascination with Attachment Theory. Humanity is made to give and receive love. It is only in vulnerable relationship that this love can flow freely. I have a renewed passion to make space for vulnerable community in my life and to fan the flame of its presence in the lives of lonely, discouraged missionaries. We are the beloved of God.

My commitment to a more spacious (and possibly less productive) life is strong and established. I want to wander with the Lord. Engaging my redeemed imagination is now a central category of spiritual formation for me. I will seek it personally and internationalize it in my missionary pastoral care work.

Much of what I have read and learned during this project has a strange familiarity, similar to visiting relatives that you have not previously met but who look like you and

share distinctive mannerisms. I am not, nor could I ever be, a neuro-scientist, but my soul “knows” what their research has discovered. I am not trained to clinically journey with people using the Attachment model, but deep within my being, I resonate with the need to be loved generously and comprehensively. I have not invested the years of sociological research that Brené Brown has to arrive at her conviction that people will experience the most fulfilling life by way of vulnerability and courage. But I know! She validates my experience and gives me words to describe things that have previously been illusive. Such has been, and will continue to be, my wonderful journey of being.

This thesis-project is the synthesis of so many ideas that I have come to deeply value. It is tremendously satisfying to bring them together in a tool that I hope will be valuable in the missions context where I serve. When I look into the rear view mirror of my years of missionary service, I see an impressively muscled “knowing-going-doing” physique reflected back at me. From a slightly different angle, the same mirror reflects a very different and less impressive image; a noticeably weak and slightly shriveled self. This image is an extension of the countless times I have sought to establish worth (to God and others) through the metrics of productivity. In essence, I chose to be a “human doing” rather than a human being.

My pastoral care role has provided the opportunity for me to sit with many missionaries similarly predisposed to doing validation. My own journey and the accumulation of the stories of others significantly informed the content of the Being Project. Sometimes I describe this project as a “Doing Detox.” At other times I frame it as invitation to renewal and intimacy with Christ. These succinct descriptions represent two sides of the same coin. My sincere hope is that exposing and deescalating “doing”

creates space for re-appreciated and reinvigorated intimacy with Christ. At its most basic level, the Being Project is an opportunity to hit reset, redefining appetites and longings with the presence of God as the central reference point.

APPENDIX A

Introduction: The Present of Presence

We all have certain vernacular that we use when we discuss our relationship with God. I grew up in a world of Quiet Times, Inductive Bible Study and “Purpose Driven” Principles. These disciplines facilitated my spiritual growth in many ways, but primarily engaged my rational self, often at the expense of my emotional/relational self. I was constantly searching, parsing, dissecting and reconfiguring God’s word, my life and my relationships. At times my walk with God felt like putting IKEA furniture together. If I could decipher the directions (sometimes challenging) and follow them precisely I could achieve the desired result. My walk with God tended to be about establishing righteous goals and building a plan of conquest.

The Church Fathers talk about relating with God in a different way. It is more responsive and less controlling than the tendencies I find alive in my personal history. More specifically, I have been captured by their idea of “keeping company” with God, which involves *receiving the gift of the day* as an opportunity to know the Father and join His kingdom expanding agenda in the world. “Keeping company” is not passive but is *attentively responsive*, believing that God is at work and is inviting my partnership with him in loving the world.

This posture of *attentive responsiveness* is the goal of this 30-Day experience. It is built around several presuppositions that I’d like to acknowledge at the outset.

- All intimate relationships (human and divine) require space to grow.
 - **So...**I will ask you to commit 30-45 minutes per day and 10-15 minutes at night (5 days per week) to making space to be with God. Each week will

also include a spiritual discipline to encourage ongoing awareness of God, self and others. (Appendix 1)

- The context of relationships is often “doing” but the substance of relationships is “being”. We often *over identify with doing roles* to the detriment of authentically being with God and others. Many of us need a “doing detox” in reference to our identity.
 - **So...**each week will focus on a different aspect of “self”. Fruitful *doing* most frequently flows from healthy *being*. My hope is that this experience invites a renewed self awareness (with God as the central reference point for identity) and that this awareness bears fruit in courage, generosity and love (toward yourself and toward others).
- God is after your heart and (especially among professionals with theological education and biblical training) sometimes your head gets in the way.
 - **So...** I invite you to a month of reflective readings that engage God through your senses and your redeemed imagination. (Appendix 2)
- God has built us for authentic community and authentic community requires a commitment to honest exposure. I must be willing to be seen in my glory and my failure.
 - **So...**you will walk this 30-day journey with a “listener”. Each week you will meet for 1 hour with your listener and you will read your journals to each other. You do not need to advise or counsel one another, and *please* resist the temptation to “fix”. *You will* prayerfully provide “presence” to

each other and graciously help your partner identify themes that you hear in the journal entries. (Appendix 3)

- God's presence bears fruit in our lives expressed in peace and security.
 - **So...**I'm asking you to take an "Attachment to God" Survey before you begin this experience *and* after you complete it. Please send me the results and I will score the assessment. Because this is a D.Min project it requires a measurement tool. My hope is that you can let me worry about this part of the project and not let it impact your experience. (Appendix 4)

Thank you for participating in this project and may you be blessed in the deepest part of your being with a renewed awareness of the love Christ has for you and gain a fresh appreciation (an attentive responsiveness) to his invitation to join him in singing the songs of the Lord in this strange land.

Blessings,

Jeff Campbell

Being Project Weekly Content

Week One: The Beloved Self

"You are my beloved child and I'm really pleased with who you are." (Luke 3:22)

Could any words be more powerful and soul nourishing? If I am honest, I must confess to a latent unfulfilled longing for the affection of God that I did not find words for until well into my forties. "I love you" spoke God's voice in the sanctuary of my mind, followed by a most defining "but..." that left me feeling like a profound disappointment. I just could not enjoy God's unqualified affection and pleasure. I did not deserve it... which is exactly the point. When the Father speaks these life-giving

words at the Son's baptism (Luke 3:22) Jesus has no recorded ministry resume, no recorded miracles or healings and no way to leverage the affection of God. These words are a foundational, soul-establishing gift, empowering everything that follows in the Gospel story.

Take a slow, sustained "soak" in the extravagant (and undeserved) love and pleasure of the Father this week. Lose your excuses and know the powerful self-security that comes from a deeply, completely loved "self".

- **Theme:** The extravagant love of God for me
- **Prayer:** Lord, give me ears to hear, "You are my beloved"
- **Reflective Reading**
 - **Day 1**-Luke 15:1-7
 - **Day 2**-Rom 8:26-34
 - **Day 3**-Is. 55:1-3
 - **Day 4**-John 3:13-17
 - **Day 5**-1 John 3:1
- **Exercise**-True Self/Shame/False Self
- **Weekly Discipline**- "Responsive Awareness": Consecrate one sense to God each day and ask God to make it a launch point to appreciating his presence.

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries,
And daub their natural faces unaware

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Week Two: The Examined Self

“Search me O God and know my heart” (Ps 139:23)

This is the cry of a secure and loved soul. This invitation is fueled by a confidence in God’s unfailing love and never ending goodness. Let’s stop pretending that we need to be more than we are. Brennan Manning reminds us that the gospel is not for spiritual super heroes but for “inconsistent, unsteady disciples whose cheese is falling off their cracker.”¹ Henri Nouwen agrees, “You are a broken man (or woman). I am a broken man, and all the people we know or know about are broken.”¹ At some point the loved self is secure enough to invite redemptive eyes into the confusion of our soul. This week is about living in active “belovedness” by asking God to show us our self through his eyes. May you cling in the security of his unwavering love for you and may you courageously ask him to assist you in unraveling more of your story.

- **Theme:** Search Me O God- Ps 139:23
- **Prayer:** Lord, grant me the eyes to see my self as you see me
- **Reflective Reading**
 - **Day 1**-Ps 23-Walk this morning with the Shepherd. Lie with him in pleasant meadows. Smell the grass. Feel it bristle under your reclining body. Journey with him through the valley of the shadow of death. What does the valley look like? What are your emotions? Sit with him at the

¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 69.

banquet table. Soak it all in. Let your mouth water. Who is with you?

Don't rush. Follow the Lord through this rich metaphor. Let him lead you.

- Each of the next 4 days will involve 15-20 minutes of Scripture meditation and 15-20 minutes reflecting on your life using the chart in Appendix 5.
 - **Day 2**-Romans 2:4 Sit with God and review yesterday with him letting this Scripture guide your conversation. Review last week (like you're watching a video with Jesus). Search for his goodness. (Mapping joy and goodness in my life)
 - **Day 3**-Ps 46:1-4: Feel the turmoil in this passage before you run to the refuge. (Mapping troubles and sorrows in my life)
 - **Day 4**-Matt 8:1-4: Let this beautiful story take you to a place of desperation and hope. (Mapping disobedience and rebellion in my life)
 - **Day 5**-Matt 11:25-30-Join Jesus in this intimate moment with the Father. Notice his tone, his body language. Let your redeemed imagination insert you into the story. How do you feel? What do you desire?
- **Weekly Discipline**-Notice your *internal monologue* and bring the conversation to Jesus.

Week 3: The Humbled Self

The posture of pride is "I know" and is, as a result, ***closed***; closed to input, closed to community, closed to love. The posture of humility is "I grow" and is, as a result ***open***; open to new perspectives, open to constructive input, open to the gift of

learning. This week your goal is to enjoy the freedom that comes when you have nothing to prove. You are accepted by the King of Creation. The Lord of love sings over you with joy. Enter each of the gospel narratives personally. Give yourself the space to enjoy Jesus. He invites you to enter the story.

- **Theme:** Christ's patience in growing his beloved
- **Prayer:** Lord, grant that I believe the gospel enough to live in its light
- **Reflective Reading**
 - **Day 1**-Luke 16:19-31-Rich Man and Lazarus
 - **Day 2**-John 2:23-3:7– Notice Nicodemus's bend toward "I know"
 - **Day 3**-John 4:27-30–This woman starts with a bent toward "I know". How does she respond to being exposed as being wrong?
 - **Day 4**-John 20:24-28- Thomas
 - **Day 5**-Luke 19:1-10-Zacchaeus
- **Exercise-** Share Week 1 exercise (True Self/False Self) with a trusted friend. Tell at least one story and ask for prayer.
- **Weekly Discipline**-Being Wrong-Notice how often you are wrong this week; wrong choices, wrong attitudes, wrong understandings, wrong perspectives. Don't justify your wrongness just live in it. Offer it to the Lord and thank him that his affection is not based on your getting everything right. Know the richness of His love in your wrongness!

Week Four: The Given Self

The essence of the Godhead is love. That is why *Trinity* is so central to Christian theology. From eternity past the Father has always loved the Son and the Spirit.

Likewise, the Son loves the Father and Spirit and the Spirit, the Son and the Father. The natural overflow of the self-secure, others-bent love of the Trinity was creation. Love cannot be possessed. It must always move outward in service, blessing and affirmation. We are invited to participate with God in loving creation. The love that we have received cannot be contained but must be expressed. This week you will wander through some powerful passages that invite you to the secure, “nothing left to prove”, others-orientation of the Trinity. Enjoy the freedom of being self-forgetful and giving yourself away!

- **Theme:** The risen Christ Invites me to be filled with his love in my “othering”
- **Prayer:** Jesus, give me a deeper love for you and for your creation
- **Reflective Reading**
 - **Day 1**-Phil. 3:7-11
 - **Day 2**-Isaiah 61:10 Let God dress you and prepare you for the wedding banquet. Walk into the wedding hall with Jesus. How do you feel? Who do you see? Soak in the sights and sounds. Don’t miss how Jesus interacts with you and with others at the party.
 - **Day 3**-Isaiah 42:6-7-This is a prophetic passage about Jesus but let it work through you today. Jesus invites us to join him in loving creation.
 - **Day 4**-John 15:9-17
 - **Day 5**-Acts 17:28a
 - Meditation Prayer

“Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my intellect, and all my will—all that I have and possess. You gave them to me: to you, Lord, I return them. All is yours, dispose of all according to your will. Give me only your love and grace, for these are enough for me.”

Ignatius of Loyola

- **Exercise-** “Love Does” Personal Mission Project- Bob Goff wrote a great book called “Love Does” highlighting the active, confident nature of free flowing love. Ask God to inspire you with an active way to give his love away this week.
- **Weekly Discipline:** Always Choose Second this week. Invite someone to go ahead of you in the grocery store check out line. Give way to a car trying to enter the expressway. Do someone else’s chore. Find a hundred ways to join Jesus in laying down your life.

APPENDIX B

Appendices to the Being Project Manual

Weekly Disciplines

Week 1- “Attentive Responsiveness”

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries,
And daub their natural faces unaware

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Scripture:

The Lord your God is in your midst

Zeph. 3:17

*Consecrate one sense (smell, sight, hearing, touch, taste) to God each day and ask God to make it a launching point for seeing Him. Enjoy the conversation with him that this stimulates

Week 2-Awareness of “Self Talk”

“Grant, Lord, that I may know myself that I may know Thee”

St. Augustine

Scripture:

Show me the way that I should go, for to you I lift my soul

Ps 143:8

*Most of us carry on an internal conversation with ourselves we seldom speak or evaluate. This week pay attention to your internal monologue. How much of it is true? How much of it is grace filled (for yourself or others)? How does it align with words Jesus might speak to you about the situations and people you encounter in your day? Bring your internal monologue to Christ and let it be the launch point for conversations (prayer) with him this week.

Week 3-Awareness of Being Wrong

“Whoever knoweth himself well, is lowly in his own sight and delighteth not in the praises of men”²

Scripture:

I dwell in a high and holy place and with the lowly in spirit

Is 57:15

* Make it your aim to notice how often you are wrong this week! (This should be fun!)

Thoughts, Attitudes, Actions, Words, Motivations, Avoidances, Neglect, Pride

Find one opportunity each day to confess being wrong and allow offer your “wrongness” to Christ. This week allow GRACE to:

- Make you aware of your wrongs
- Give you confidence to confess your wrongs
- Season your conversation with Jesus that is stirred by your “wrongness”
- Make you aware of His love that overwhelms our worst self

² Thomas A Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Book 1, Chapter 2 (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour and Company, 1984).

- Invites us to come

Week 4-Righteous Risk Taking

“In the giving it becomes clear that we are chosen, blessed and broken not simply for our own sakes, but so that all we live finds its final significance in its being lived for others.”³

Scripture

Put yourself aside, and let others get ahead

Phil 2:3

*This is the week for intentional “othering”. Last week you were aware of a life filled with so much “self”. This week take a chance in loving. Each day do something for someone else that extends the gospel, brightens the light, and amplifies the song! (This really will be fun!!) Ask the Lord to make you aware of opportunities and to give you the creativity and courage to bless others. Talk with him about how you feel in both “successful risk taking” and times when your best effort goes down in flames!

Reflective Scripture Reading

Directions for Praying the Scriptures; Sitting in God’s Love

Find a comfortable position and a place where you feel comfortable talking out loud to God.

Ask for grace to know and feel His love. Be generous with God. This means offering your heart to Him and letting Him give you all that He wants to give. Teresa of Avila said, “God never tires of giving, nor can He exhaust His mercies. Let us not tire of receiving.”

³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1992), 105.

Read through the Scriptures three times out loud. Notice any word or phrase that seems to stand out. When this happens, stop and stay with the word or phrase and see where your heart goes. See where He leads you. Pay attention to your feelings and be honest. He desires honesty and nothing is a surprise to Him. He is sturdy and can handle anything you have to say.

When it seems time to resume reading the Scripture continue on.

Once you read it through three times, then be still, again pay attention to where He takes your heart. Notice if images, words, or thoughts come to mind. Listen to Him. Talk to Him about what things come up.

Do this for no longer than 30 minutes. At the end of the time thank Him for the time, the chance to be in His presence.⁴

Now take 10-15 minutes to record in your journal any thoughts that seem significant about your time with the Lord.

Move into your day aware of His enabling, empowering presence in everything that is ahead of you.

Close of Day Examine: 15 minutes

- Find a quiet place.
- Sit quietly for 2 minutes and appreciate the presence of the Lord.
- Take 10 minutes to review your day using the Prayer of Examine as a template.⁵
- Meditate for 2 minutes on Ps 4:8.

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.

⁴ Gail Pitt, *First We Were Loved: A Year of Ignatian Prayer*, 2014, Nashville, TN, 106 Spring Valley Rd, Dovehouse Ministries.

⁵ Bookmark Provided

Prayer of Examination



“The Lord is near to all who call on Him”

Ps. 145:18

Thanksgiving

“Praise be to God...who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing”

Eph 1:3

Lord, I realize that every good gift comes from you.

Today, for what things am I most grateful?

Examination

“Show me the way that I should go, for to you I lift my soul”

Ps 143:8

Lord, open my eyes and ears to be more honest with myself and You.

Today, in what ways have I joined You? ...avoided You?

Contrition

“I dwell in a high and holy place and with the lowly in spirit”

Is 57:15

Lord, grant me the humility to know that I am often wrong.

Today, what choices have been inadequate responses to Your love?

Hope

“There is hope for your future, declares the Lord” Jer. 31:17

Lord, let me look with longing toward the future.

Today, how will I follow you forward?

Spiritual Listening

So much of this 30-day journey revolves around attentive Spirit enabled listening. You will enjoy that daily with the Lord in your morning and evening appointments.

You will also enjoy the privilege of providing presence to your partner on this journey once per week by listening to the journal entries that he/she chooses to read to you.

Schedule 60 minutes together. Pray briefly and then each of you should take 20 minutes to read your journal entries to each other.

To the Listener: Please treat your role as a listener with holy confidentiality. This is a sacred place to which you are being invited. Lock arms with the Spirit to come along side your brother/sister and join them in prayer and presence.

Please resist the desire to counsel or fix. Seek the Lord for any word that you choose to offer. God is at work. Please trust His timetable and be careful in any inclination you might have to improve his “efficiency”. Deep change is often a slow process.

When your partner asks you provide a few observations of themes that stood out to you. Use the words that your partner used in his/her journaling not extra interpretive commentary of your own design.

Resist the need to speak wisely for your own validation. If you do not have words, live in the confidence that none need to be offered. God is the author of challenge and change in our lives. We can wait on Him

To the Sharing Partner: As you journal throughout the week do so with unhindered honesty. You only need to share that which you are comfortable sharing. Trust is important to every relationship but it grows at different rates. Read the entries that match the trust you have with your listener.

That said, the gospel shines in our brokenness and humble exposure is crucial to a dynamic spiritual life. “Grace only sticks to our imperfections. Those who can’t accept their imperfections can’t accept grace either.”⁶ Take a chance and be seen.

⁶ Donald Miller, *Scary Close* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2014), 45.

Week One: Unmasking my False Self:

Instructions: Everyone is born with a self. I'd rather you not get lost in the theology of how sin nature impacts your infant self, but I'd like to invite you to consider the early formational moments of your "self". All of us have early memories of being confronted by the reality that something was wrong with us. For some this came as an inner awareness that we were not enough, for others this entered our lives through the thundering judgments of others. Regardless of the origin the message was the same.

"You are not enough"

"You are inferior"

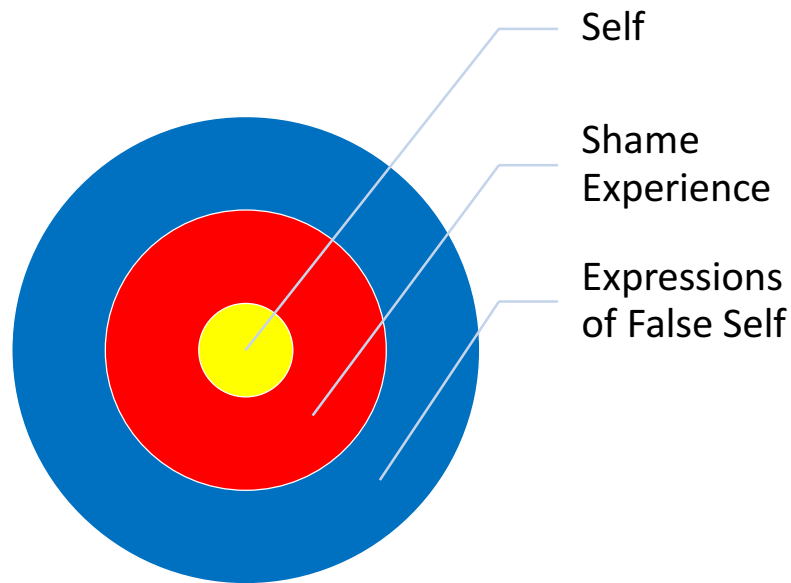
"You are dangerous"

"You are weak"

This vulnerable exposure (real or imagined) resulted in *shame* and caused a response right out of Gen. 3.

You hid. I hid. We all hid. We created *false selves* that seemed to protect us from the judgments of others and secure for us some sense of approval from the world around us. In short, our false selves are our attempt to make ourselves loveable. The only problem is they are built on false projections not authenticity. The false self can never be loved. For love to have its designed effect it unmask our false selves, redefine our shame and speak to the deepest part of who we are.⁷

⁷ Donald Miller, *Scary Close*, 20.



- Reflecting on Shame: Take 10 minutes and ask God to journey with you through your childhood memories of shame. What early memories stir thoughts of inadequacy, incompetence, unloveliness or vulnerability? Try to come up with at least one of these memories.
- Reflecting on expressions of False Self: Take 10 minutes to ask the Lord to reveal choices you made as a result of experiencing this shame.
 - What vows did you make to yourself?
 - What parts of you did you choose to hide?
 - What false expressions of self resulted?
 - Offer up your False Self to the Lord of Love.
 - Confess your self protection and hiding

- Reflect: Sit for a few minutes with a word from the saints:
 - “...but then love defeated this fear”¹
- Listen to the Father:
 - You are my beloved son/daughter, with you I am well pleased.

(Luke 3:22)

Week Two: Life Mapping

Each of the next several days you will think about your life using a particular lens. Try to identify at least one significant event in your “early years”, “middle years” and “recent years”. You are free to use your own discretion in defining each of those seasons of your life. With each event, write down the people who you associate with that memory. To the best of your ability discern how this event impacted your thoughts about God. Similarly, discern how the event influenced you thoughts about yourself. Finally, write down any significant observations the Lord stirs from this memory.

Before you begin ask God to take you to the memories and events he would like for you to process. Some of you will want to spend much more time doing this. The 15-20 minutes is a suggested minimum. Feel free to come back and add other events during the week that God brings to mind. Make sure that sharing some of these events is part of your meeting with your partner this week. Walk with Christ as you reengage the rich complexity of your story. Ask Him to stir new self-understanding in the joy, the trials and the rebellion.

Our sufferings and pains are not simply bothersome
interruptions of our lives; rather, they touch us in our

uniqueness and our most intimate individuality.⁸

Henri Nouwen

⁸ Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 71.

Joy and Goodness				
Event/Memory	People Involved	Perspective of God	Perspective of Self	Lingering Thoughts
Early Years				
Middle Years				
Recent Years				

Troubles and Sorrows				
Event/Memory	People Involved	Perspective of God	Perspective of Self	Lingering Thoughts
Early Years				
Middle Years				

Recent Years				

Disobedience and Rebellion				
Event/Memory	People Involved	Perspective of God	Perspective of Self	Lingering Thoughts
Early Years				
Middle Years				
Recent Years				

Summary Thoughts from the other 3 Charts				
Event/Memory	People Involved	Perspective of God	Perspective of Self	Lingering Thoughts
Early Years				
Middle Years				
Recent Years				

APPENDIX C

Attachment to God Inventory⁹

(Beck & McDonald, 2004)

Rate each statement below of a 1-7 scale

1=Disagree Strongly, 4=Neutral/Mixed, 7=Agree Strongly

Name: _____

Circle One:

Pre assessment

Post assessment

- 1 I worry a lot about my relationship with God. _____
- 2 I just don't feel a deep need to be close to God. _____
- 3 If I can't see God working in my life, I get upset and angry. _____
- 4 I am totally dependent on God for everything in my life. _____
- 5 I am jealous of how God seems to care more for others than for me. _____
- 6 It is common for me to cry when sharing with God. _____
- 7 Sometimes I feel like God loves others more than me. _____
- 8 My experiences with God are very intimate and emotional. _____
- 9 I am jealous of how close some people are with God. _____
- 10 I prefer not to depend too much on God. _____
- 11 I often worry about whether God is pleased with me. _____
- 12 I am uncomfortable being emotional in my communication with God. _____
- 13 Even if I fail, I never question that God is pleased with me. _____
- 14 My prayers to God are often matter-of-fact and not very personal. _____
- 15 Almost daily I feel like my relationship with God goes back and forth from "hot" to "cold" _____
- 16 I am uncomfortable with emotional displays of affection to God. _____
- 17 I fear that God does not accept me when I do wrong. _____
- 18 Without God I could not function at all. _____
- 19 I often feel angry with God for not responding to me when I want. _____
- 20 I believe that people should not depend on God for things that they should do for themselves. _____
- 21 I crave reassurance from God that God loves me. _____
- 22 Daily I discuss all my problems and concerns with God. _____
- 23 I am jealous when others feel God's presence and I cannot. _____
- 24 I am uncomfortable allowing God to control every aspect of my life. _____
- 25 I worry a lot about damaging my relationship with God. _____
- 26 My prayers to God are very emotional. _____
- 27 I get upset when I feel God helps out others, but forgets about me. _____
- 28 I let God make most of the decisions in my life. _____

⁹ Richard Beck and Angie McDonald, "Attachment to God: The Attachment to God Inventory, tests of working model correspondence, and an exploration of faith group differences," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 2 (2004): 92-103.

AGI SCORING FORM

Question/Item	Anxiety over Abandonment	Avoidance of Abandonment
1. I worry about my relationship with God.		
2. I just don't feel a deep need to be close to God.		
3. If I can't see God working in my life, I get upset and angry.		
4. I am totally dependent upon God for everything in my life.		R
5. I am jealous at how God seems to care more for others than for me.		
6. It is uncommon for me to cry when sharing with God.		
7. Sometimes I feel that God loves others more than me.		
8. My experiences with God are very intimate and emotional.		R
9. I am jealous at how close some people are to God.		
10. I prefer not to depend too much on God.		
11. I often worry about whether God is pleased with me.		
12. I am comfortable being emotional in my communication with God.		
13. Even if I fail, I never question that God is pleased with me.	R	
14. My prayers to God are often matter-of-fact and not very personal.		
15. Almost daily I feel that my relationship with God goes back and forth from "hot" to "cold".		
16. I am uncomfortable with emotional displays of affection to God.		
17. I fear God does not accept me when I do wrong.		
18. Without God I couldn't function at all.		R
19. I often feel angry with God for not responding to me when I want.		
20. I believe people should not depend on God for things they should do for themselves.		
21. I crave reassurance from God that God loves me.		

22. Daily I discuss all of my problems and concerns with God.		R
23. I am jealous when others feels God's presence and I cannot.		
24. I am uncomfortable allowing God to control every aspect of my life.		
25. I worry a lot about damaging my relationship with God.		
26. My prayers to God are very emotional.		R
27. I get upset when I feel God helps out others, bur forgets me.		
28. I let God make most of the decisions in my life.		R
SUM FOR EACH COLUMN	/ 14	/14
AVERAGE FOR EACH COLUMN (Divide Column sum by 14)		

Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) Scoring Sheet: Transfer each item rating to the appropriate box. Reverse score those with an R (1=7, 2=6, 3=5, 4=4, 5=3, 6=2, & 7=1). Add up the sum for each column. Then compute the column average by dividing by 14.

Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004) Interpretation Sheet
Purpose: This inventory is meant to measure a person's global attachment tendencies in relationship with God (i.e., their attachment style with God).

The Client's Scores:

Attachment Anxiety: _____ **Attachment Avoidance:** _____

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